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The Human Condition in Communist China

Translated from the French by

EDWARD FITZGERALD

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BOOKS THAT MATTER

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AFTER leaving a province burdened by the exactions of a tyrannous overlord, Confucius and his disciples came to a wood where they observed an old woman weeping by an open grave. The sage stopped, and sent one of his disciples to inquire the cause of the woman's distress.

"The father of my husband was killed here by a tiger," she replied. "And then my husband also. And now my son has suffered the same fate."

"But why then," the sage inquired, "do you stay on in such a dangerous neighbourhood?"

"Because at least there is no tyrannous government in these parts," the woman explained.

Confucius now turned to his disciples.

"Mark that poor woman's words," he said. "An oppressive government is worse for the people than a tiger."

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PREFACE

NUMEROUS books on Communist China have already been published, but to my knowledge not one of them has fully utilised the richest mine of information available—and the most cogent: the evidence of the refugees themselves. That is an omission I propose to remedy in this book.

China offers us an example of a phenomenon very rare in the history of revolutions; not a class emigration but a mass emigration; not an emigration made up of *ci-devants* who have lost their privileges, and whose evidence might therefore be coloured by their resentments, but an emigration of ordinary people fleeing from the new order after living under it for a number of years. It seemed to me unforgivable that no attempt should be made to take advantage of this extraordinary exodus in order to get at the truth. The stories of ordinary people of all trades and occupations who have experienced the conditions of everyday life under the new régime provide us with the most revealing information concerning the nature of the régime—information which is much more significant than the shallow data which is all that the casual visitor can provide.

In order to get that information straight from the mouths of those first-hand witnesses I went to Hongkong, the town on which the main flood of refugees converges. There I questioned fifty-four of them, of all ages and both sexes, of a variety of trades and occupations and coming from all parts of China. This book presents the evidence of these first-hand witnesses as to the truth about Chinese Communism.

Except where the refugees in question could speak English or French, I questioned them through interpreters helpfully provided by the free trade unions of Hongkong. I took voluminous notes at the time, and at the end of my interrogations, in order that my memory should not fail me, I made a draft and added notes on the character of the man or woman I had questioned and on the background of his or her experience. In my final revision I did my best to reflect the authentic atmosphere of their stories.

The first thing the witnesses invariably did was to beg me not to

reveal their identity for fear of reprisals against their relatives still living in Communist China. I have therefore given them pseudonyms. In the case of those witnesses who would be particularly exposed, such as former members of the Chinese Communist Party and of the Communist trade unions, I have taken the further precaution of changing the names of the provinces from which they come and of the towns in which they worked.

In certain cases where several refugees gave evidence on the same social subject-matter I have allowed myself to merge them into one synthetic person; but to avoid letting that synthetic person become artificial, I have given him the character and the genuine background of one of the witnesses whose evidence went to make up the whole. In this way the human unity and authenticity of the experiences recorded have, I hope, been preserved. On the other hand, I have purposely admitted repetitions whenever they concerned a matter of special importance but cast light on it from different angles.

In order to support, confirm and link up all this important evidence I have consulted documents of Communist origin—the text of official pronouncements, self-criticism, articles, decrees, statistics. The value that may be attached to them is discussed from time to time in the book. Many of these Chinese sources have been taken from other expert studies.

In conclusion I wish to thank with all my heart all those who made this investigation possible: first of all the very helpful trade unionist Mr. Fung; then the committees in charge of the refugee camps, who did their best to facilitate my inquiries; and finally, and in particular, the refugees themselves who were good enough to tell me their personal stories, which were always poignant and sometimes involved no little risk to their relatives and themselves. In a situation in which they had to work long hours to earn their daily bread and keep a roof over their heads, they gave me a good deal of their spare time in order to tell me what they themselves had experienced and what their country had suffered, even though the revival of such memories was clearly heart-rending for them. They were obviously prepared to suffer again in retrospect in the hope of, through me, informing the free world of the truth. It would be a betrayal of their confidence if I failed to do my best to satisfy their unspoken demand. May this book—their book—help to provide what they have every right to expect: aid for their great and unhappy country.

S. L.

I

THE TRAGEDY OF THE HONGKONG REFUGEES

ONE of the most poignant tragedies of our time is screened behind one of the most fairylike sights to be found anywhere in the world. The scene is one of incomparable beauty: the brown mountains running down to the blue sea; the green coves with their golden sands; and the blue water dotted with junks whose poops and prows rise pagoda-like above the decks with their ancient sails bellying in the breeze. It all looks so magical from an airplane that you hardly know where to look first. You close your eyes for fear the wings of the plane should shatter themselves against the sides of the steep mountain gorge. Down below are islands of mythology and the buildings of the metropolis, and ancient sails like the wings of dragonflies and radar masts jutting into the air like bayonets; you can see them all, mingling with each other. But also down below the tragedy of a million refugees from Communist China is being played out.

WHAT THE GUESTS OF MAO IGNORE

At Christmas 1941 the colony fell into the hands of the Japanese. Its labour force, its commerce and its industry declined and its harbour was destroyed. When the British reoccupied the city in 1945 it had only 600,000 inhabitants. Today it has a population of two and a half millions. As the natural growth of the population can account for no more than perhaps half a million, it is calculated that about a million and a half of the population consists of Chinese who have fled from the mainland during the past ten years.

Fugitives are still flooding into this British colony from Communist China at the rate of 10,000 a month. They escape by junks or sampans over the sea; they also escape by swimming across, and in that final effort many of them find a watery grave and eternal peace; under cover of night they escape by land through dense undergrowth and ravines, striving desperately to keep out of the moving searchlights, and away from the police dogs, machine-guns and barbed wire with

which Mao seeks to close his frontiers. And many of them are shot down by bullets at the very moment of crossing the frontier into freedom.

Some nights smugglers carry as many as 200 "coiled serpents", as the refugees packed at the bottom of the junks are called. The Hongkong newspapers are constantly printing reports like this: "Fifteen Chinese fishermen who fled to the city from the coast of Kwangtung in their vessels have asked for asylum." Or even more tragic reports: "On October 6, 1956, thirty prisoners condemned to forced labour made a break for freedom whilst working on a road near the frontier. The Communist guards opened fire. Four of the prisoners were shot dead, three were recaptured and shot at once, but the rest managed to reach safety in the New Territories, one of them seriously wounded and supported by two comrades." And these reports do not always refer to civilians; for example: "A group of Red soldiers escaped from Chinese Communist territory by swimming, and came ashore waving safe-conducts dropped by Chinese Nationalist planes. Some of them asked for asylum in Hongkong; the others asked to be sent to Formosa to join the Chinese Nationalist forces there." At the end of June 1956 fifty men engaged on road-work near the frontier managed to escape across it during the night led by Pan Jen Shih, a former education inspector. And again: "On June 12, 1957, thirty-seven men sentenced to forced labour were being transferred on board a vessel guarded by three soldiers. They overpowered their guards, seized the vessel and brought her into Hongkong." Interrogated by the British authorities these convicts claimed to be ordinary working men, teachers or journalists whose only crime was that they had expressed their dislike of the Communist dictatorship.

But it is not only to "the perfumed isle" that the flood of refugees rolls. Other waves roll towards Macao, Quemoy, Matsu, Formosa, the virgin forests of Burma and North-East Pakistan. Wherever there is even the smallest gap in the bamboo curtain ordinary Chinese do their best to escape from the vast prison camp the Communists have made out of their country. If that curtain were raised, if the internal passes which make each Chinese province a separate cell in that great prison were abolished, and if the British authorities did not pursue such a strict immigration-quota policy, the Chinese would abandon the territory under Mao's régime by the million. Mao and his friends know this perfectly well, and one of the greatest crimes in present-day China is to attempt to get out of the country. Any fugitive caught in the act is immediately executed.

Where do all the refugees who do succeed actually come from? From all parts of China: from territory near by and from the remotest provinces, from Kwangtung and Fukien on the shores of the China Sea, from Jehol and Hsing-ngan on the marches of Siberia. Some of them take years to reach their objective, working on the way, adopting ruses as cunning as those of any Sioux—like the little trick of the escaping student who filled his note-book with enthusiastic praise of the Communist Party and its doings, for the secretaries of the local Communist cells to find and read when they searched his belongings whilst he was asleep in the communal dormitories. A hundred times and more they have risked deportation to far-away places for violating the regulations governing interior movement from place to place; risked torture as spies if they were caught near the frontier; risked death from the vigilant machine-gun squads when they made a dash for the frontier; and all that in order to escape to the Capitalist Hell of Hongkong. Capitalist Hell it is for those of us who have the good fortune to live in any of the Western democracies, but for the Chinese who have first-hand experience of the Communist régime it is a haven of freedom.

How many of them are there? The Taipeh authorities, with the assistance of non-party Red Cross commissions and of the United Nations, estimate the number of persons who have fled from Communist China since 1952 at four millions. Less than half of these fled to Hongkong. Some 160,000 managed to reach Formosa. The rest are dispersed amongst various other asylums. Incidentally, even before 1952, more than two million refugees had fled to Formosa from the Chinese mainland, whilst a further million had found refuge elsewhere. One may assume that this first great batch of refugees which fled immediately after the Communist seizure of power in China consisted mainly of people who were *a priori* enemies of the new régime; those who were vanquished in the struggle, and whose departure from their country therefore offers no valid test of the feelings of the Chinese people towards Mao's régime. Only those Chinese who became hostile to the régime on the basis of their unbiased experience under it, *i.e.* after the Communist seizure of power, and who fled in consequence, can be regarded as cogent witnesses. According to the figures quoted above, the number of those refugees whose evidence may be regarded as politically conclusive is approximately four millions spread over a period of six years.

Who are they? Statistics drawn up by the British authorities in

Hongkong concerning a batch of 100,000 refugees who fled to the city from Communist China between January 1956 and September 1957 show that approximately 40,000 of them were agricultural labourers, 20,000 of them poor peasants, 20,000 working men and artisans, 10,000 soldiers, and 10,000 officials, merchants and others.

THE CAMP AT RENNIE'S HILL

Rennie's Hill, which lies to the north-east of the Kowloon Peninsula, was a deserted hillside only a few years ago. On June 26, 1950, the Hongkong authorities established the first 7,000 refugees there and provided them with two free meals a day. At the same time an Assistance Committee for the Rennie's Hill refugees was formed to provide them with clothing, medical attention, the service of barbers and material with which to build themselves shelters. That, in all its moving simplicity, is the preliminary history of the camp at Rennie's Hill.

By January 1952 there were 20,000 refugees there: about 16,000 men and 4,000 women. Various manufactures were started to provide them with work, and some of them worked allotments in terraces on the hillside, breaking up the ground with whatever primitive instruments came to hand, and carrying water from long distances in whatever receptacles were available. Some of the refugees set to work to erect shelters of oiled paper and straw to sell to newcomers needing a roof over their heads. Gradually little streets began to form and even a sort of market centre appeared, a primitive market with primitive stalls, offering primitive utensils and puny vegetables grown, as a tribute to human industry and determination, on the rocky slopes of Rennie's Hill. Within a few years the refugees had been able to sell their own agricultural produce in their own markets, and what had been a bare hillside gradually became the embryo of a future city. Within our lifetime, Rennie's Hill may well become another Kowloon.

All the refugee camps suffered various disasters. For example, in October 1951 Rennie's Hill camp was gutted by a great conflagration. In September 1953 it was devastated by a typhoon known as "Susan"; and in August 1954 it was again ravaged by a typhoon—this time with the name "Eda". And after each disaster the Chinese refugees—without ever having read a line of Kipling's famous poem—rolled up their sleeves and built it all up again with worn-out tools.

Attached to each camp is an official social-service office, but the refugees have also organised their own system of democratic admin-

istration. In all the camps, at Rennie's Hill, Hongkong, Kowloon, Ma An Shan and Chian Wan, the first permanent buildings are always the schools and the public-health centres. I was very gratified to see that the refugees' children were not just left on the streets. At Rennie's Hill, where there are over 2,000 schoolchildren, I visited two kindergarten, infant classes and classes for the older children. I saw charming classes, where the children sang in chorus the names of the lines and dots forming the Chinese characters as the schoolmistress followed the crooked lines on the blackboard.

In the same way, all the camps have improvised temples and churches for the various religious denominations: Taoist, Buddhist, Moslem, and of the Christian communities: Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Seventh-Day Adventists and an American sect which calls itself the Congregation of God.

It should be made quite clear, of course, that these camps have nothing in common with those concentration and forced-labour camps which have gained such sad notoriety under Nazis and Communists. The occupants of these refugee camps are free to leave them at any time, and to stroll around in the streets of Hongkong. They are, for example, perfectly free to leave the place altogether and to return to Communist China if they so desire; which, of course, they do not. The camps arose in the first place as centres designed to give the refugees preliminary aid, and in time they often transformed themselves into permanent dwelling places according to the age-old laws of human settlement and the development of sedentary life.

Rennie's Hill is one of those camps which has taken root and become a permanent settlement, a very small national microcosm grown up in strange circumstances, for although it is in a British colony the flag of Nationalist China floats over it, a white sun on a blue sky, like a curious premonition of the country which was to give shelter to that small limb torn away from the main bulk of its people.

In old documents China is referred to as "the country of ten thousand cities". Here is the embryo of the ten-thousand-and-first city; the daughter of adversity certainly, but a witness to the power of will. In the bare side of the steep hill which dominates the surroundings, the builders of this new city have set six large white Chinese characters, visible from a long way off like great buildings. In the subtle contours of a writing conceived 5,000 years ago by the scribes of an Emperor, the Son of the Heaven, those characters read: "Long live the Free Republic of China!"

THE PEASANT FAN LING

I was informed that a peasant in "Category 4", in other words, a very poor man, had crossed the frontier of Kwangtung and was now at Fan Ling, in the New Territories. I immediately asked my friends of the free trade unions to accompany me there. The peasants still represent eighty per cent. of the population of China, and therefore it is a matter of some importance to find out what they think of Mao's new régime.

The so-called New Territories are on the narrow peninsula joining the British colony to the mainland of China, and they were leased from China on July 1, 1898, for a period of ninety years. There I met again the fairylike countryside of Hongkong itself, many promontories and islands surrounded by blue sea like dark pupils in the centre of immense clear irises. But to my surprise we then came to a vast flat area which looked quite out of place. Obviously it was not part of the scenery that God had arranged for this part of the world. It looked as though some other will had set it there, and I was not surprised to learn that it was, in fact, the work of man and woman. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread," Jeh-O-Va must have said to Ah-Dam-Ming and E-Va-Chou when he had them driven from the Paradise of Jade.

And from our car I saw them at work, those yellow ants who formed their own world with their own hands, won it square yard by square yard from the sea by filling up the holes, and from the mountains by removing the peaks. They looked insignificant on the mountainside and anachronistic in their pointed straw hats, working bare-legged with their primitive tools. It was almost as though woodmen were to attempt to fell great oaks with dessert knives. And yet, although they seem as nothing against the landscape, with patience and determination those Chinese gradually master it, just as their ancestors have done for 10,000 years, clearing the great plains and plateaux of what were once virgin forests, and working farther

and farther outwards to the north, south and west until they had transformed a whole continent of mountains and forest into one gigantic ricefield.

The miracle of patience is being repeated at Hongkong. With their sinewy hands which never rest, with their patient spirits, and their steady, deliberate and persistent work, they labour so hard and so well on that rocky soil, that in the end they tame it and harness it to their purposes. Moreover, as all creators do, they shape it into their own image. What I am crossing here is a remote corner of the empire of the Chou which flourished 3,000 years ago. There it lies with its small ricefields under lukewarm water, its huts amid bamboo clumps, its wooden ploughshares, its slow-moving water buffaloes, its leaping carriers, and here and there the curved roofs of some rural temple jutting above the trees like a snub nose from the bedclothes. The small café at which we stopped looked, with its four wooden tables worn and polished for centuries, and its eight spidery benches, like an old T'ang woodcut. We were very close to Communist territory now, and I could not help thinking that on the other side of the near-by frontier and under the same peaceful sun innumerable families were experiencing at this very moment the drama of clandestine flight.

★

And then the man appeared whom I had come to question. For the sake of convenience I have given him the name of the place where I met him—Fan Ling. He was tall and thin—not that I ever saw a Chinese refugee who was fat—and his shaven head was like a polished stone. A prominent Adam's apple jutted out under the skin of his sinewy neck. Was he an old man, or had misery and privation dug those furrows in his face? He sat down on the end of a bench, folded his hands shyly in his lap and waited. He was offered sandwiches and a bowl of chocolate, but he touched neither, and at first he replied to none of my questions. He sat there quietly, and the only prominent thing about him was that Adam's apple which rose and fell as he swallowed nervously.

My two interpreters—two were necessary because the man spoke a provincial dialect, and what he said had first to be translated into mandarin Chinese before it could be turned into French for my benefit—then told me that, seeing that I was blonde, Fan Ling feared I was a British agent, and that the intention of my questions was to get him to go back to Communist China.

"Tell him that I am a French journalist, and that French people like the Chinese peasants," I said. "Here, show him my passport."

I had forgotten for the moment that he would not, in any case, understand French and that in all probability he could not read. However, the sight of my passport, even though he could not decipher it, had a miraculously persuasive effect, and after that he spoke freely, telling us his name and that of his village. Gradually he came out bit by bit with his whole story, which I subsequently put into shape. It appeared that "the agents"—kanpous in Chinese, a word which was to recur constantly in this and all my subsequent interviews—had put him into "Category 4", the poorest of the poor, since he had never at any time owned even a scrap of land. When he was given his allotment, it was a joyful and almost incredible day for him. He, the poor son of a poor father, had never hoped to own a piece of land, to become a landowner! Naturally, he was grateful to the Communists and gave them his vote. To be able to work his land, he got himself into debt to obtain a few tools, some manure and seeds—and to underline the dignity of his new social status he even got married. But then, a few years later, the kanpous came again and explained at great length and with theoretical reasons which he did not understand that everything must now be put into common ownership; and so the little property of Fan Ling, his tools, his pigs and his buffalo were all taken over by the Commune—but not his debts.

"I wept secretly that night, lying beside my wife. I couldn't understand why the agents had to take everything which belonged to everyone, so that nothing belonged to anyone any more. I had worked fourteen hours a day for four years on my piece of land in order to have something I could leave to my son, with whom Providence had already blessed my marriage. Why did they have to stop me now? What had I done wrong? Why wouldn't the kanpous let us sell the produce of our toil any more, as peasants had done in our country for thousands of years? I had to give up my land, my few possessions and my harvest to their 'co-operative', but they didn't do anything about my debts. And that worried me terribly because I could soon see that with what they left us I should never be able to pay them off. You see, it wasn't the Communists who had lent me that money, but old Wang Chou Min; and he did it because my wife was the daughter of one of his old tenants. Oh, of course I knew that he wouldn't dare to complain if I didn't pay him. He had once been a rich man and he now wanted it forgotten. His brother had

already been sent away to a camp, and he and his son had been dragged to the village square to make a public confession. My piece of land had been taken from his."

"How much land did they give you then?"

"About sixty poles."

"And how much land did Wang Chou Min have altogether?"

"Oh, a lot! It was divided up between seven of us."

I made a rapid calculation of how much land that "rich" man Wang Chou Min had possessed in his palmy days, and it worked out at about two and a half acres. I realised that I was face to face with that Communist manoeuvre of setting the very poor against the not quite so poor. The real aim of the Communist agrarian reform was not to establish a class of prosperous small peasants, but to engender hatred. In China, as elsewhere, there are degrees of poverty. The less poor have been declared "rich", because in this way it is easier to let loose a flood of envy and resentment against them, whilst at the same time the Communists can pose as the avenging angels—though their real aim is to seize the harvest of all the peasants, irrespective of their category.

"But Wang Chou Min wasn't a bad rich man," went on Fan Ling. "When I was a boy and there was nothing in the house, my mother would send me out to see what I could find, and it was always in his kitchen that I'd get a bowl or two of rice. But the kanpous said he was an exploiter of the people, and we mustn't be sorry for him. Soon after that his son was shot, and the old man didn't have anything more to live on. You know, he had been put under *Kwantchee*."

"What's that?"

"*Kwantchee*? Well that meant he was working for the police."

"For the police? What, denouncing other people?"

"Oh, no. Just working for them; pulling out the weeds in the roads, helping to get in the harvest."

"Wasn't he a member of the co-operative then?"

"No, of course not, because he was a counter-revolutionary."

"He worked, you say, though. Didn't he earn enough to live on then?"

"No, of course not. You don't understand. I told you that he was under *Kwantchee*."

I had the strange impression that I was like a Chinese peasant working particularly difficult terrain; that I had to employ the same patience to get information from Fan Ling as he had had to use to

remove all the stones from his patch of land. But as far as *Kwantchee* was concerned I did not succeed, and it was not until I returned to Paris and looked up the *White Book* by David Rousset that I learned that some former landowners were placed under *Kwantchee*, which meant that they were put at the disposition of the local police who made them work without receiving any payment in return. Those treated in this way were usually the old and infirm, who would be no use in forced-labour camps, and so they were handed over to the local police for odd jobs. Sometimes they are hired out for harvest work, but the payment is made to the police and not to the men themselves. In other words, the men under *Kwantchee* are more or less the public slaves of the local village community.

"At night, old Wang Chou Min would send the smaller children round to the back of the house to beg a little rice. Now, although the kanpous may have been right in their arguments, I knew in my heart that I owed him a debt. And I also knew that, whatever he might be, the children couldn't be counter-revolutionaries seeing that they had hardly been born when the revolution took place. So I gave them rice, though it meant that there was less for my own children. And that's easy enough to understand." Suddenly Fan Ling showed indignation. "The kanpous left us twenty-four catties of unhusked rice for each adult and ten for each child. Now, honestly, who could keep body and soul together on that?"

I nodded my head to indicate that I was in complete agreement with him, though what a cattie was I had no idea. My interpreters now tried to explain to me how much that Chinese measure represented. Apparently it was less than a Chinese pound, which is less than an English pound, which is less than a French metric pound. I was flabbergasted. But I had only to look at the jutting bones of that peasant beneath his yellow skin to see that twenty-four catties of rice were obviously not enough to keep a man's body and soul together properly—particularly as the man went on to explain that they never got any meat or milk; and that oil, sugar and tea were rationed in tiny quantities. He had to make up as well as he could with sweet potatoes and other vegetables he grew around the house, attending to them when he came home from the fields in the evening.

"But at least the rice cost you nothing?"

"Oh, yes, it did! We had to buy it from the co-operative. They even created special money for that."

"You didn't use the Yuan?"

"The Gen Min Piao?¹ Oh, no, that was used to pay for clothes and other things from the town, and to subscribe to loans. They introduced special money for us to buy things from the co-operative with; notes which weren't any good for anything else. The only thing to do with them was to turn them into food at once. Very often, in order to get something to put in the children's bellies, I used to join the 'volunteers' on road-making or terracing. Many peasants used to get a bit extra by stealing from the stores. They were sent to prison if they were caught, of course, but that didn't stop it. What's a man to do? If he's hungry enough he'll take food wherever he finds it."

"What about your house? They tell us that since the revolution a lot of building has been done."

"Our houses? Nothing's been done to them. They were there before the revolution; made of mud, which doesn't keep out the monsoon rains very well or stand up to the teeth of rodents."

"But haven't the Communists built brick houses in the villages now?"

"Yes, but only the Party headquarters and houses for the kanpous."

"But had your conditions improved at the beginning of the revolution, before the land was collectivised?"

At that question Fan Ling frowned with the intensity of his thought. It was clear that the collectivisation, which had robbed him of his land, had had such a traumatic effect on him that everything before then was like something in a dream, something very difficult to remember. But he was doing his best. It was a sort of previous life which had left only vague and fleeting memories. In the end he said: "There were things for and things against in the revolution. For example, ration cards were issued at about the same time as we were given our land. But oil, tea and sugar were almost unobtainable. And there was no cloth either. Before, the women used to weave their own; but now we had to buy it in Mao's shops. And it wasn't such good quality and it soon wore out, which was a pity. But apart from all that, yes: in the beginning I got by somehow. Wang Chou Min gave me advice about tilling the soil. I should have been able to start paying him back what I owed him in instalments, but respect prevented me. You see, things were going badly for him; he was old now, and alone, and looked down on; and under *Kwantchee*. The trouble started for me when the kanpous forced us to give them our land."

He had been forced to give up his precious land; that was what

¹ Indifferently "Yuan" or "Gen Min Piao"—the Chinese dollar.

"collectivisation" meant for him. What he said confirmed reports that, after the agrarian reform, social differentiation spread throughout the countryside again, and faster than ever. What provoked it was the oldest factor in the world, the factor which has produced rich and poor from the beginning of human society: the natural inequality of ability, ambition—and also opportunity. The slower-witted, or the less fortunate, would have to borrow money to get what they needed—seed, the services of the blacksmith, a goat, a wife. And then, in order to pay the money back, they would have to work for their creditors, and this would prevent their working harder for themselves, and thus accelerate their downward slide. On the other hand, more industrious and active men like Fan Ling, or the more cunning ones, would be able to increase their possessions. On the eve of the famous collectivisation order issued by Mao Tse-tung on July 20, 1955, a new rural petty-bourgeoisie was in process of developing in China, and it was growing with all the speed and strength of a new vine. I recalled that exactly the same process was going on in the Soviet Union after six years of Lenin's New Economic Policy; and that in order to arrest it, Stalin turned life into a hell on earth for Ivan Ivanovitch, the Russian brother of the Chinese peasant Fan Ling.

As far as Mao was concerned, the process had been foreseen, because there was the experience of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to go on; and the Chinese Communist Party was quite determined to take the land back at the first suitable opportunity—and that from the very beginning, from the very day the land was distributed. I felt depressed at the thought that in the years 1945 to 1948 even American statesmen had allowed themselves to be deceived to the extent of regarding the Chinese Communists as "agrarian reformers", when they were really nothing but demagogues deliberately deceiving the people in order to establish their tyranny the more firmly.

"But you experienced bad years before the Communists came?" I asked.

"Yes, of course, but then the cause was an Act of God, wars and floods. And there were also good years. Nowadays all years are bad. Whether heaven is harsh or lenient, it makes no difference, because the kanpous are always harsh, and they requisition everything. And to make it worse, if a man goes into the town to try to get something to eat, he is turned out and treated as a 'deserter' and a good-for-nothing. Now formerly—and the honoured father of my father, and

his father before him, did the same—when there wasn't enough to eat in the country, men went into the towns to try and get work, and no one ever treated them as traitors and vagabonds."

I could see that the insulting treatment he had received still rankled, and that the thought of it still made him tremble with anger. And I could well understand it, because to accuse a Chinese of being a vagabond and good-for-nothing is the worst insult you can offer him. There is no more industrious a machine on earth than a Chinese peasant; he works and works, and he is prepared to work until he drops. Remembering the many bicycles I had seen in Formosa, I asked him whether the Chinese peasants could buy themselves bicycles in Communist China. At that question he looked at me almost in desperation. It was obvious to him that I had understood nothing of what he had said.

"But I told you we hadn't enough to eat," he said. "So how could we buy bicycles? If we had any money we bought rice."

"When the Red Army occupied your district was it well received by the people, or was there any resistance?"

"Well, that was very complicated," he admitted, and he scratched his head. The question was obviously a difficult one.

"You see, the Red Army paid for the goods it requisitioned. And the soldiers of the War Lords and the Kuomintang didn't always do that. So the peasants often welcomed the Red Army. But the Red Army went on as the fighting line rolled forward, and instead of the army we had clouds of young Communists, all strangers, descending on us. Youngsters of between twenty and twenty-five years old."

"Were they all as young as that?"

"Yes, but they were like wolves already. They decided to impose taxes on us, but we had just paid our taxes to Chiang Kai-shek, and for the whole year, so we had no money left. The peasants now rose in revolt against the imposition of these new taxes, and they were supported by their secret societies."

"So you Chinese peasants also have secret societies?"

"Well, why not? Peasants aren't any more stupid than other people, you know. The members of our secret societies are often pretty decent fellows and neighbours. The sort of people you'd never suspect of leading a double life. But when the Communists are around, practically everyone has to keep his affairs to himself. You just have to lead a double life: one in the co-operative, and the other at home when the door is shut."

"And what happened to your revolt then?"

"The Communist kanpous wouldn't budge. The agitation spread to village after village. But then suddenly, one day, all the ringleaders and all the members of the secret societies were arrested."

"What happened to them?"

"Some of them were shot. Others disappeared and no one knows what happened to them. Still others were brought up for trial, and they had to confess in public that they were in the pay of the Japanese. They also said that they could now see how criminal they'd been and how much they regretted their errors. We all had to be present at their trial. Then they were publicly flogged; and we all had to shout insults at them. We were afraid of what would happen to us if we didn't."

One of the interpreters explained to me that Fan Ling did not realise that what had happened was deliberate Communist policy; and that the Communists often intentionally created a wave of discontent and resistance in order that hostile elements and members of the secret societies should reveal their presence. Once these dissident elements had been spotted and "liquidated", then the first batch of kanpous would be transferred and a host of new agents would arrive to "explain" to the peasants why everything had happened.

"Were you obliged to attend political courses?" I asked Fan Ling.

"Yes, two hours at a time three times a week."

"And what did they teach you?"

"Gibberish as far as I was concerned. I didn't understand any of it. And I don't think the kanpous did either. But sometimes I managed to find a dark corner and take a nap, which was very useful, because I was always very tired."

(Once again I had found that the last refuge for the human being was a dark corner. . . .)

"And when you were a member of the co-operative, how were you treated then?"

"Like little boys at school. The President of the co-operative was a stranger, brought in from outside by the kanpous, and we all had to sit there and cheer what he said. That was how he was 'elected' too. And he surrounded himself with other strangers; men in cloth caps always carrying brushes and pieces of paper to write on. They invented a rule of three of their own: how much we had to produce; how much we had to give up to the State; and how much we were allowed to keep for ourselves. Then we were divided into teams, and the teams were sub-divided into sections. Then we were all given little books

and we had to work by something called norms. They judged how much we had done, and kept their eyes on us, and at the end of the day they entered our tally in those little books. At the end of the year they collected them and made calculations which no one could understand. We got paid according to their calculations, and no one was allowed to say a word.

"They also brought along some tough fellows who worked together in groups; 'Shock Workers' they called themselves, and what they did we were supposed to do. That was how they fixed the norms. And how those fellows worked! They made forty yuans a month. But it was heart-breaking; we were worked to death. In the cotton fields of my co-operative we had to pick eighty pounds a day. It was impossible, and in his despair one of my wife's cousins tore up his little book. He was called to the office, and after that no one ever saw him again. The rest of us had to bow down and present ourselves every evening to our new masters to beg them to mark the points in our books. And many of us were men who hadn't had masters since the days of the Ming Emperors. It was humiliating to have your work noted down in little books by such sergeants, as though you were little boys—and by sergeants who did no work themselves but just made signs in books, when they were not spying on what we did. And we had to feed them on the little the kanpous left us. Our fields had become like a factory, but we were worse off than workers, who at least get their fixed wages every week; *we* had to wait until the end of the year before they told us how much the points in our little books were worth. The Communists said they made the revolution in order that there shouldn't be any more proletarians, but now they've turned everybody into proletarians, including the peasants."

I was deeply impressed to hear that fundamental truth from the mouth of a humble peasant, a basic truth that so many pedantic commentaries have overlooked: namely, that the "historic function" of collectivisation is to reduce the peasants, a stock continually producing small independent businessmen, to the status of proletarians, because proletarians can be more easily controlled, taxed and organised; men who, in short, fit much better into the bureaucratic framework which is the alpha and omega of the new dominant class.

Fan Ling was silent for a while, and then he continued: "Even when I was at home in the evenings I dared not complain any more or talk it over with my wife, because my son, who was now six years old, used to come home from school with very nasty ideas. He'd tell

us what they'd taught him, and he spied on us. He wasn't a bad boy, and he would have been all right if we'd dared to bring him up properly. But if we had he'd have been expelled from the school. The whole thing made my wife ill."

"Who persuaded you to flee? And why didn't you bring your wife with you?"

At this latter question the eyes of Fan Ling filled with tears.

"It was the school which finished her. One day the kanpous declared that everyone must learn to read and write. I knew a bit already, because a Buddhist monk had taught me the rudiments, but she didn't know anything at all; and now she had to go back to school again. She had to work in the fields as well as looking after the house and the children, and so this new burden was just too much for her. At one time she had been a lively vigorous woman, and if I did anything that didn't please her she'd give me the rough side of her tongue. But now she gradually became so exhausted that she couldn't even answer the questions of the schoolteacher. She didn't make any progress and so the kanpous said she was deliberately sabotaging the lessons. She had been under suspicion since her cousin had torn up his labour book, and, like him, she was now called to the office. I never saw her again."

Once again I was flabbergasted. The story sounded incredible. But I remembered that Lucien Bodard had mentioned deportations for "sabotaging the learning of orthography".

"That was when I decided to clear out," continued Fan Ling. "I couldn't stand it in the empty house, without my wife any more. I went away at night on foot; first of all to my brother in the town. As he had helped the Communists, he had been rewarded with a job in an office. But I knew that he was leading a double life too, and that in his heart he loathed them. He promised me to look after my children: and when I had gone, he pretended that I was dead, deliberately identifying a swollen body that was pulled out of the river as mine. There was no scarcity of bodies, because there were a lot of suicides. He also got me a train ticket, gave me enough food to last me three days, and sent me to a friend of his who lived on the coast, a fisherman."

"But didn't you need special police permission to travel from one province to another?"

"Yes, that's right. Everyone has to have a special passport to journey from one province to another—and even special permission to stay somewhere else for the night. And all sorts of other permits. It was all very depressing at my age to have to have passports before

you could move around. Those identity papers caused an awful lot of trouble."

"But didn't you have identity papers before the Communists came?"

"What for? Everyone knew everyone else in the village. Everyone knew when you were born, and they knew when you died. But when the Communists came they made a dossier for every single person in the village. There were things in those dossiers about us all that we didn't even know ourselves. And when the dossiers were ready, they took all our fingerprints, and each one of us was given a number and a card with more stamps on it than a banner I once carried as a boy one national holiday. That banner had a list of all the rights the Emperor had granted to our province on it. Just think of it: the Communists issued six hundred million identity cards! Everyone in the village—not only the adults but the children too—had an identity card with his name and all his particulars and his thumbprint on it. That was so that the kanpous could keep a better eye on us all. And we had to work to keep them while they were busy making out all their lists and their cards."

"But with all those permits and stamps you needed in order to move around, how did you manage to get out safely?"

"Well, you see, it's like putting up fly-papers to catch flies. You catch a lot of flies, but you don't catch them all. We Chinese peasants are like the flies. When a train arrived at a station, it was always packed with people. There were crowds of them; so many that the agents couldn't possibly control them all in the time. I was one of those who managed to give them the slip. And then, you know, they're not all that clever. Apart from their papers and their lectures they very often don't know what to do. All the same, I was sometimes very scared. . . ."

"Just one last question: are you sorry you came to Hongkong?"

When that question was translated to him he burst out laughing and looked at me to see if I were serious. I realised that it was something like asking a German Jew who had escaped from the Nazis to the United States whether he was sorry he had done so. "Look at me now," he said proudly. He was wearing cotton pyjamas and sabots on his bare feet. I looked him up and down and wondered what he was getting at.

"When I left," he explained, "I was in rags. But I've got work here. It's true I have to work for someone else, but I earn enough to feed three people, never mind one. Under the Communists I had to

work all day long, and very hard; and even then I couldn't earn enough to feed my family properly. My wife had to work in the fields too."

During the questioning, I had wondered from time to time why he hadn't touched the food we had offered him. He was obviously emaciated and underfed. Sandwiches and chocolate should have been a treat for him. But when we rose and took our leave, he immediately devoured the sandwiches eagerly and drank the chocolate so quickly that his Adam's apple moved up and down like a piston. Had he been too scared to eat and drink during the questioning? Had he been afraid that something disagreeable was going to happen to him? The explanation, whatever it was, remained hidden behind the suspicious face of the peasant who is always on the *qui vive*, as his father had been before him, and as his children would be after him; and as all peasants are who have to bear the burden of the ambitions, the wars and the ideologies of the well-dressed gentlemen in the towns.

THE FORMER COMMUNIST KU

GIVE the devil his due. If you want to find out something about a Communist régime, it's as well to start off by questioning one of its former supporters who has become cured of his illusions. There was no shortage of them in Hongkong, and the difficulty was which one to choose. But in the person of Ku they found me the perfect example of the ex-Communist in Asia. What he had to say was so fascinating that I talked to him for two mornings and a whole afternoon in the primitive little café of the camp where I met him. His evidence provided the central core of my investigations: the spine, as it were, of all the evidence which was to follow.

The value of his evidence regarding the history of the Communist Party in China was to some extent counter-balanced by a certain lack of individual humanity. What he had to say referred more to general events than to the personal experiences of the man himself. It was sometimes difficult to see the wood for the trees, and although Ku's story was the richest source of information I managed to obtain during my inquiries, it contained perhaps less Chinese colouring than usual. On the other hand, perhaps the very impersonal quality of the evidence authentically reflected the real nature of Communism: arid, bureaucratic and without native roots.

Ku was forty-three years old; well built, and with a somewhat enigmatic expression on his face, but he talked clearly and vigorously, and underlined what he had to say with firm gestures. His eye was keen and he gave the impression of being destined to become what they call an activist of some social doctrine or the other. His father had been a shoemaker and his mother an embroideress. The family lived in a market town in Kiangsi, and he had a string of uncles who cultivated their patches of land in the neighbourhood. There was a Belgian Catholic mission in the town, and its members brought their shoes to his father to be repaired. The contact established in this way, they also taught the boy to read and write. These missionaries were, of

course, anxious that in addition to learning to read and write Ku should worship their God. But in their headquarters there were books, pictures and photographs of Europe. In one of their rooms there was even a wireless, and the house had running water. Young Ku was fascinated by all this. Although the missionaries did not realize it, and had no such intention, what they were actually doing was propagating the Western way of life rather than their religion—and in a small, out-of-the-way town in a Chinese province the West spelt Revolution.

On the mission's wireless young Ku, at the age of sixteen, heard an appeal broadcast by the Kuomintang youth organisation to take part in the building up of the country. He was carried away with enthusiasm and he answered the call. It was not long before he revealed two talents which are essential to an active Communist: the one was a talent for organisation, and he soon had a group of a dozen other young Chinese around him; and the other was a talent for clandestine activity, for neither his parents nor the missionaries heard a thing about his activities, of which they would most certainly have disapproved: his parents because they were traditional in their outlook, the missionaries because they were prudent.

In the meantime Ku earned his living in his father's shop; and in the evenings—somewhat to the regret of the local girls, because he was a handsome boy—he studied. By this time he was determined to go to the university. Other characteristics proper to the new class of Communists also revealed themselves: social ambition, a solid practical sense, industry, and a lack of any very strong interest in personal relations—in love, for example. It struck me, as this psychological picture gradually took shape, that it would have applied with equal force to the rising bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century in France, though the bourgeoisie used these qualities for business purposes, whereas the new class of Communists used the very same qualities for politics. The Communist is the bourgeois of organisation just as the capitalist was the bourgeois of manufacture.

The turning point in Ku's life came in 1932, when he was eighteen years old. A troop of Communist guerrillas attacked the village where he lived and fought a pitched battle with a Kuomintang battalion which had been stationed there for some time. The Kuomintang troops were routed, half the village went up in flames, the missionaries were driven away, and Ku's parents were killed. Ku was now an orphan in Communist-occupied territory. Thanks to their spies in the

Kuomintang, the Communists knew about him, and they set to work to win him over to their side. They soon succeeded, since Ku was just the type. He stayed with them for twenty-five years, occupying various offices and gradually working his way up the Communist ladder. And then came the final victory of Communism in China and the establishment of the dictatorship.

"The only phases which I did not experience personally," he explained, "were those which *preceded* the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. That is to say, first of all their alliance in the years 1924 to 1927, a period which ended with the Canton uprising; and then the troubled period from 1928 to 1931, during which the Communist Party was casting around for a new policy."

To give the reader some idea of the historical background I will describe briefly the principal stages in the history of Communism in China up to the moment when Ku made its acquaintance himself. It is generally realised, I think, that the revolution of 1911, which swept away the Manchu Dynasty and established the Chinese Republic, did not subsequently develop according to the wishes of its prime initiator Sun Yat-sen. By 1920, when, under the influence of the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party was founded, it had only a handful of members, but the general political situation was once again chaotic, and the country was divided up amongst various so-called "War Lords", each playing for his own hand. The only ray of hope was still Sun Yat-sen, who had made his headquarters in Canton, where he founded a modern national liberal party known as the Kuomintang. From 1920 to 1924 the Communist Party, although actively supported and financed from Moscow, made very little progress, whereas the Kuomintang grew rapidly until it was able to take power in Canton. It followed a policy of collaboration with Moscow, and Sun Yat-sen signed an agreement with Joffe, the representative of the Soviet Government. In 1924, on the orders of Borodin, the representative of the Communist International in China, the Chinese Communist Party entered into an alliance with the Kuomintang. Sun Yat-sen even accepted Borodin as his adviser, and at his instance he adopted certain Bolshevik organisational methods which had proved their worth, and founded the famous Military Academy at Whampoo. Under the leadership of a brilliant young officer named Chiang Kai-shek it soon became a Chinese Sandhurst, training enthusiastic young officers for the southern forces.

In 1926 Chiang Kai-shek began to advance northwards, winning a series of uninterrupted victories over the War Lords, who were crushed one after the other until the whole country to the south of the Yangtsekiang was in Kuomintang hands. But in the meantime friction was growing between the Kuomintang and its Communist allies, who were doing their utmost to exploit the national resurgence in their own interests. In March 1927 Chiang Kai-shek's forces occupied Shanghai, and at the same time he disarmed the Communists and ruthlessly suppressed their party. This put Stalin very much out of countenance, for it was he who had ordered the Chinese Communists to lay down their arms at the orders of Chiang. He now instructed them to join up with a small splinter movement known as the "left-wing Kuomintang", which had seceded from the main body and had its headquarters in Wuhan. But in July 1927 this local government also broke with the Communists and rejoined the Kuomintang. Now threatened with complete isolation, and once again acting under Stalin's orders, the Communists organised the Canton Rising, which took place in December. That venture, which was quickly suppressed by Chiang Kai-shek and cost the lives of several thousand Communist supporters, resulted in a seemingly irrevocable breach between the Communists and the Kuomintang, and put the Communist Party outside the law.

From 1928 to 1931 the illegal Communist Party alternated—still under the strict tutelage of Moscow—between ultra-revolutionary adventurism and ultra-opportunist reformism in vain attempts to find a new way to power and influence. In accordance with the ultra-revolutionary phase, the so-called "Third Period", which was popular in Moscow at the time, Li Li-san proclaimed a virulent policy of "Class against Class!" which was marked by occasional "lunatic sorties" on the part of very small groups of Communist workers in the towns. When it became obvious that this policy was merely blundering from one disaster into the next, Moscow declared that the failure was due to "left-wing opportunism", and dismissed Li Li-san, expelled many of his supporters, and handed over control to Mao Tse-tung, who now inherited amongst the political débris one instrument of capital importance: a small army which had been formed during the various crises by his friends with the help of Soviet emissaries. It was more or less at this point that Ku's personal experience of the events began.

"You can say that I'm really a product of Mao," explained Ku,

"because it was in 1931, a little time after I joined the Party, and after the various somersaults of Moscow—which had caused such confusion in our ranks that—Mao finally succeeded in getting his own way in the Party."

"You must have read the story of those years *before* Mao came to the fore; how were they presented in the literature of the Chinese Communist Party? Were you told that the disasters suffered by the Party were due to Stalin's mistakes?"

"Good heavens no! Moscow was always right, no matter what it did. The only causes of our troubles were 'historical conditions', plus the treachery of Chiang Kai-shek. The historical analysis showed that the relationship of the classes and the contradictions of imperialism made 'the left-wing bourgeoisie' represented by the Kuomintang 'historically progressive', which meant that our alliance with it was 'dialectically necessary'. But on December 13, after our disastrous *putsch* in Canton, 'the infrastructure' suddenly took it into its head to change, and in consequence the bourgeoisie which had just been 'left-wing and progressive' suddenly became 'reactionary and feudal'. The new historical analysis showed that 'the revolutionary process' required the formation of clandestine working-class trade unions against the Kuomintang. But in 1931 the historical process equally suddenly ceased to require this; in any case, it had led us to defeat after defeat and decimated our forces. Once again this was not Stalin's fault, but that of the 'left-wing opportunist' Li Li-san. And from now on 'the historical process' required us to abandon the towns and concentrate on the countryside, that is to say, to adopt Mao's policy. It would appear that from now on Stalin rather lost interest in us and gave Mao his head, while continuing to furnish him with supplies."

The irony with which Ku spoke of his former political Church seemed to indicate that he had been thoroughly cured of his illusions.

"How strong was the Communist Party when Mao took over the reins?"

"From the time of its foundation in 1920 with a handful of members up to the time of the Fourth Congress of the Party in 1925, which decided that the Party should merge with the Kuomintang, it had gained only about a thousand members. But in the following two years, once admitted as a partner in the great offensive against the War Lords, with its supporters ensconced in every nook and cranny in the Kuomintang, and exploiting the ardour of the youth, politically ignorant but enthusiastic for action, which filled the ranks of Chiang

Kai-shek's army, the Party grew rapidly until at its Fifth Congress in May 1927 it had 60,000 members."

"So the Chinese Communist Party fattened on the Popular Front policy too?"

"Yes, that is so. Within the ranks of the Kuomintang the Communist Party found an audience much greater than any it could have obtained under its own banner."

"Tell me: what exactly was the 'Mao Line' in China then? Many people in Europe seem to think that it was something entirely new and they attach all sorts of magic virtues to it."

"There was really nothing magic about it—unless you count it a great discovery to realise that in politics you have to act according to circumstances. Mao preferred simply to base his actions on Chinese reality rather than on Marxist theories; that's all. Which doesn't mean that he neglected using Marxist theories; oh, no! in his speeches he appealed to them with a dogmatism all the more rigid because he turned his back on them in practice. What Mao actually meant was this: 'I'm against what I have here in front of me today: the Kuomintang Government. And I shall fight against it with the forces now available around me, that is to say, the peasants.' In practice he also took advantage of China's age-old weakness. The fact that the country is so large, and that to control it from any central spot is very difficult, has always encouraged the setting up of local overlords, whether feudal, military or partisan. Mao therefore set out to carve himself a little kingdom somewhere, just like any War Lord or religious leader—in fact he's a little like both—but he called his kingdom a 'Soviet Republic'. He succeeded in setting it up in my province, Kiangsi."

"But wasn't his success there something of a miracle?"

"Yes, if you call the triumph of common sense a miracle. Mao had between 20,000 and 30,000 men at his disposal, most of them deserters from the National Army, equipped with Russian aid. And amongst the population he was supported by unemployed intellectuals, a floating mass of students, professors, writers, mandarins, people disappointed in the Kuomintang, and prone to mouth extremist phrases. And then, of course, he could play on the silent, endless and age-old suffering of the Chinese peasant."

"In other words, the three traditional forces of China: the soldier, the mandarin and the peasant."

"Exactly. And Mao just mixed them all according to Machiavelli's precepts for gaining power. In the areas he dominated he

gave more than land to the peasants; he gave them stable taxation, so that at least they knew where they were."

"I must say, that's a new angle for me."

"Very likely. I know that abroad Mao is regarded as an agrarian reformer who divides up the land and gives it to the peasants, but that's nonsense. In that part of Kiangsi where Mao managed to establish himself under Chiang Kai-shek's nose from 1930 to 1934, you could hardly find a hundred people who owned more than a dozen acres. Mao didn't divide the land and give it to the peasants for the simple reason that it was already divided amongst them; though later on, in Honan and Chensi, where we subsequently managed to establish ourselves, there were peasants who had recently been dispossessed by local Kuomintang lordlings. But apart from that, eighty per cent. of landed property in China was in small and very small holdings, according to a stratification which was already hundreds and sometimes thousands of years old. Of course, that didn't prevent the Communist Party from launching its 'agrarian reform', but it was really only a cloak for political machinations intended to demoralise the peasantry, which has always been very united in China: by ancient customs of good neighbourliness encouraged by the teachings of Confucius and consolidated by local family ties.

"Before those full-time agents, brought up on Communist theories and parachuted from their books into country areas, could hope to establish themselves, it was absolutely essential to break up this compact mass of peasantry by fostering discontent and resentment. For this purpose, Mao established five categories of peasant, and set the lower categories against the upper; those who had no land against those who had, however little. The redistribution of the land by the Communists was never carried out on either a humanitarian or an objective technical basis, and it was always preceded by campaigns charging the better-off peasants with all sorts of crimes in order to stoke up the envy of the poorer peasants. The Party often carried out executions according to a maxim which was popular amongst us and was attributed to Stalin by some, and to Danton by others: 'Blood binds more than it divides.'"

"You said that Mao's trump card was the introduction of stable taxation. Just what do you mean by that?"

"You know, when I think over our success, I'm not at all sure that it was due to any fundamental measures at all, because I can remember occasions when we were greeted on entering a village by showers of

stones—if the whole population hadn't already cleared out ahead of us after destroying everything. No, I think the thing which won us most support was that once we had established ourselves in a district, we imposed *fixed* taxes, which were known in advance. We did not free the peasant from tyrannical masters, since we subjugated him more than any feudal overlord had ever done before, but we did rid him of their arbitrariness, and of sudden and unforeseen taxes and imposts."

"But at this present moment, isn't it true to say that just that kind of arbitrariness has been imposed again under the Communist State, with its régime of discretionary requisitions and imposed prices without recourse?"

"Yes, that's true, of course. But, you see, Mao is safely in power now, which makes a difference. At that time he still had to *gain* power. That is why, in those days, he would never have adopted any measure so unpopular as the collectivisation of agriculture."

"When his influence was confined to the limits of the 'Soviet Republic' in Kiangsi, didn't he ever try any collectivist experiments then?"

"No, he took good care not to. In any case, that policy of restraint wasn't particularly Maoist. Both in Eastern Europe and in Asia the Communists always start by giving the land to the peasants, and they don't take it back again until they are firmly in the saddle and can't be got rid of. But Mao was never all that firmly established in Kiangsi, and when Chiang Kai-shek launched a big military offensive against Kiangsi our weakness became obvious, and we had to carry out the famous 'Long March' northwards, round the whole central basin of the Yangtsekiang, which was held by Chiang."

"Was that march really the tremendous epic Communist propaganda makes it out to be?"

"Yes. For once Communist propaganda doesn't exaggerate. For us, that period was equivalent to the civil war for the Russian Bolsheviks. The struggle hardened our men and steeled our spirits. The one new thing Communism did bring to China—as it also did to Russia—was the mainstay of any organisation—will power. We introduced *intensity* into countries which had previously known only *diffusion*. Perhaps it is that same element of inhuman will and determination which distinguishes the Communists from all other groups and parties in your Western world. It can truly be said that it proved indestructible during our period of trial. It was the 'Long March'

which really gave Mao his great prestige, gaining him the combined reputation of a great captain like Trotsky and a great bureaucratic tactician like Stalin. The following dramatic figures will give you some idea of the difficulties with which we had to contend. When we set off from Kiangsi in October 1934 we were 75,000 strong. When we finally arrived in Yen-an, after constant rearguard actions, there were only 10,000 of us! Not only did we have to fight the regular troops of the Kuomintang, who were superior in numbers, better equipped than we were, and kept regularly supplied from central bases, whereas we had to march along peripheral lines without any supply centres, but also the people's militias which Chiang Kai-shek, who had taken good note of our methods, organised in the areas through which we had to pass. And they fought even better than his regular troops, because he was cunning enough to lace them with our worst enemies: those who had deserted from our ranks, those who had been expelled from the Party at the time of the Li Li-san purge, and those whose land we had expropriated.

"We had to form our convoys on the spur of the moment, seizing anything on wheels, from light Soviet tanks to ox-drawn carts, not despising rickety Fords, mule waggons and motor cycles with sidecars; and much of our transport fell to pieces on the way. And it wasn't only the soldiers we had to transport, but members of the Party and their families as well—not to mention our famous archives and our propaganda equipment. We had to keep on the *qui vive* the whole time, and we had to live off the country, distrusting the population through which we passed, because, of course, we had no time to set up our police and keep an eye on them. All the same, for the youngsters, and certainly for me, it was an unforgettable experience; an extraordinary and thrilling mixture of Boy Scoutism, banditry and proselytisation; a new kind of knight errantry; an apostolate of exactions; a mixture of maquis war and street fighting. It was this brotherhood of combat and camp-fire comradeship which finally consolidated the forces of the Party, though it often proved dangerous too."

"What do you mean 'finally'? And why 'dangerous'?"

"Dangerous, because Communist leaders don't much care for bonds of friendship among Party members. They don't like human ties; only organisational ties. During the three years we were the government in Kiangsi, I never once established real ties of friendship with a comrade. But when the forced exodus came, it broke up the normal

rigid organisational ties and put initiative into the hands of small groups. We no longer acted according to the slogan and for the record, but in defence of our lives and those of our immediate comrades, and we were constantly being called upon to face unexpected dangers. In that atmosphere of individual responsibility human nature came to the surface again, and warm and friendly contacts were established between us. We were bound together now by a great adventure experienced in common, and no longer merely by our functions. But later on, those friendly contacts hampered our advancement. Those at the head of the Party are suspicious of personal bonds between their activists. And only those who subordinate themselves completely have any chance of advancement. Incidentally, Mao, who had studied the Russian Revolution to the extent of putting it in card files, had learnt from Stalin, who had learnt from Machiavelli, or merely through his own natural perfidy, that the men who have carried you to power have to be eliminated if you are to stay there. Such men are too sure of themselves, and they think they have a right to your gratitude."

"Yes, that's nothing new to me. Revolutions settle down only when their engineers have been killed by their profiteers. But did you experience that natural ingratitude straight away?"

"No. Only after 1949, by which time Mao had subjected the whole country. When we arrived in Yen-an in the autumn of 1935, that is to say, in an area near Outer Mongolia, which is Soviet territory, we found a place for ourselves that the Kuomintang had neglected to take under control. We were so exhausted when we finally got there that just one more vigorous attack by Chiang Kai-shek would surely have finished us off, because we could have retreated no farther without clashing with the Japanese who had annexed Manchuria in 1931 and were firmly established there. We were never able to understand why Chiang Kai-shek did not deliver the *coup de grâce*. Perhaps it was because Stalin, who feared Japanese expansion, now put himself out to be friendly to him, although only the previous year he had condemned him as a reactionary and a criminal. This was the time of the great change of policy in Moscow, when there were smiles and cajoleries for all previous 'monsters'—the French Laval, for example. But at the same time Stalin sent us new equipment and supplies through the Southern Mongolian frontier, and we were allowed a respite. Once again we proclaimed a new republic on the basis of the old one in Kiangsi, but this time we chose a different and even more deceitful name: 'The People's Republic'."

"Why do you say 'even more deceitful'? Were there no more Soviets in your first republic in Kiangsi than 'people' in your new 'People's Republic'?"

"The Soviets in Russia really were spontaneous bodies formed by the masses in revolt. They were infiltrated by the Bolsheviks and turned into assemblies of yes-men only many years after the revolution had succeeded. As far as we were concerned, our Soviets were never anything of the kind. In our case everything came from above, and everything was imposed on the country and the people by the Party. There was never a single Soviet in China as a spontaneous formation. Our Soviets started at the degraded point at which the Russian Soviets left off. Our Soviets were never anything but prefabricated bodies we would call together, whenever we chose, to cheer us and approve what we had done or intended to do. After that they were sent packing, and all that remained was a residue of officials previously appointed by the Party. I told you that Mao had put the Russian Revolution in card files, and it was on that basis that he worked out his own programme. He was able to introduce the bureaucratic phase straight away, whereas in Russia it took many ups and downs to achieve it. You can't therefore really say that we ever had a 'people's revolution' in China. No upheaval of that magnitude was ever so completely fabricated. Which only goes to show that the power of the Communist apparatus is so great that it can conjure up entirely new social forms out of nothing and without any popular support.

"I said that after 1930 Stalin lost interest in us and gave Mao his head; but it must be added that Mao limited himself to copying Stalin—not so much in the methods by which he came to power, which Mao was clever enough to adjust to Chinese conditions, but at least in the bureaucratic institutions, which he founded along Stalinist lines. All Mao did, you might say, was to make an album of pictures of Stalin's achievements, sort out what suited him, and impose the reproductions on China. That's what gives his whole performance that air of *déjà vu*, that monotonous impression of a lesson learnt by heart. And the only thing which lends any life and colour to it all is the 'Long March'."

"Tell me, did Soviet counsellors give you much assistance?"

"To a certain extent. There were always half-a-dozen around Mao, and more still around Chu-teh, our War Minister. But I think they were chiefly liaison agents whose work was to co-ordinate our actions

with Moscow policies. Mao had assimilated Bolshevism so thoroughly that he no longer needed any counsellors. He is one of the Communist Olympians, and every bit as strong, confident and immovable as Stalin or his successor Khrushchev."

"Once you had settled down in Yenan, did you get much trouble with the Japanese?"

"No. On the contrary; they helped us in a very fundamental way, because their very presence provided us with patriotic slogans in addition to our agricultural slogans and this helped us a great deal in penetrating into the rest of Chinese society: the towns and, in particular, the intellectuals. The intellectuals are the most important class in a country where the great masses of the people are uneducated, and where by tradition everything comes from above. Whoever has the intellectuals has China."

"I imagine that's more or less true of all under-developed countries."

"No doubt it is. In any case, where my country is concerned it is true to say that the proletariat gave Communism no support whatever. The working class remained closed to us right to the last; so much so that when we finally came to power we had to dissolve the existing trade unions and create a new trade-union organisation from scratch.¹ In 1932 the Soviet Republic of Kiangsi declared war on Japan. It was a piece of verbal extravagance which didn't cost us much war, but brought us many fighters. We won credit and support. I was myself sent on missions to various universities in order to set up patriotic groups, leaving behind one or two of our agents to keep them going. You already know that Communists are past masters in the art of exploiting intellectuals in various satellite organisations which are outwardly independent but which are really Communist-run. These intellectuals think they are supporting worthy causes, but in reality they are being used to serve the purposes of the Communist Party. I had plenty of money at my disposal, because in that kind of work you're no longer dealing with poor people but with people accustomed to a high standard of living: they have to be provided with journals, congresses, platforms, secretaries, travelling expenses, and so on. I was proud and impressed by the fact that I now had access to the universities—and not as a student, which I had never found possible, but as an

¹ I discovered a confirmation of this fact in a speech delivered by the Communist Minister of Labour Li Li-san on November 21, 1949, in which he declared: "The special character of the Chinese Revolution resides in the fact that the large towns were not won by any revolt of their own factory workers, but by the armed forces of the Liberation."

equal amongst the professors. I was a sort of a leader of consciences, a man of experience, someone to be treated with respect.

"In particular I helped in founding the 'Society for National Safety', which rendered the Party excellent service. Thanks to its good offices we at last succeeded in restoring our contacts in the official army, and, in particular, we got round General Chang Hsiu-liang, who was in command of the troops in Shansi. He was a sincere patriot but rather naïve. The secretary of the Society for National Safety was a well-known professor of history. He was supposed to be non-party and independent, but actually he was in our pocket; and he succeeded in convincing the General of the necessity of re-establishing agreement between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. In December 1936, Chiang Kai-shek, who in the meantime had realised that his General was no longer altogether reliable, arrived in Sian Fu, the capital of Shansi, in order to take things into his own hands, but General Chang Hsiu-liang arrested him on the spot. That was a bolt from the blue if you like! General Chang Hsiu-liang wanted to force his chief to agree to a 'Sacred Union' between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party against the Japanese. By that time, the forces of Mao had been doubled, and Chiang was under great pressure from all sides. I must say that he showed remarkable fortitude in a very difficult situation. He proudly refused to negotiate as a prisoner with his rebellious subordinate, and said that he was quite prepared to die. His wife showed herself worthy of him by hurrying to his side. This noble example restored courage and confidence in Nanking, which was the capital of the Kuomintang Government, and troops were mobilised to release Chiang by force. Finally, under pressure from both Stalin and Roosevelt, who were equally interested in mobilising all possible forces to stem the Japanese tide, our puppet Chang Hsiu-liang gave way and released Chiang, who went back to Nanking. That magnanimity paid off. Chiang realised that we had become too strong to be ignored, and that he was himself not strong enough to wage a civil war against us and the war against the Japanese at the same time; and once he was free, he agreed to negotiate. On July 7, 1937, under the influence of the Japanese landing at Shanghai, which marked the formal opening of hostilities between Japan and China, a new agreement was come to between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party for a united national front."

"On what terms?"

"On the face of it, the Communist Party seemed to be making big

concessions. The Red Army was integrated into the regular army under the Kuomintang, and the insurgent government in the Soviet provinces was dissolved and the administration there taken over by governors appointed by Nanking. But the big difference between the new united front and the one which had existed in the years 1924 to 1927 was that the Communist Party did not merge with the Kuomintang this time, but retained its own separate organisation, whose legal existence Chiang Kai-shek now recognised.

"In keeping us outside the Kuomintang, Chiang reckoned that we should not be able to win over his partisans as we had done in the years 1924-7. But what he did not realise was that once Communists have established a strong apparatus, legal recognition tremendously increases their chances of taking power when the time is ripe. I don't know, of course, whether in his heart of hearts Chiang really had abandoned all intention of suppressing our party, or whether he was merely biding his time; but at least there is no doubt that at the time, and under heavy pressure from the Japanese threat, the Kuomintang sincerely desired effective co-operation with the Communist Party. Mao's intentions were very different. No matter what the circumstances, a Communist has one ultimate objective only, and that is the exclusive seizure of power; everything else is merely a means to that end. A Communist will never ally himself with anyone with the sincere intention of co-operating for a common aim, but only because the alliance offers, or seems to offer, a better chance of establishing his own ultimate domination.

"As Chiang really needed the alliance with us, he appointed a governor in Yen-an who was sympathetic towards us, with the result that within a few days the Party had this man where it wanted him, and for all practical purposes the Communist power in Yen-an remained intact, but this time under the protective cloak of Nanking. And as Chiang Kai-shek really needed our troops for the fight against Japan, he did his best to see that they were kept in as efficient a state as possible, and therefore decided to use them as they were, under their own officers. But since those officers were ours, they were not so much interested in fighting the Japanese as in consolidating and extending Communist influence, and they used their units for this purpose. They distorted Chiang's instructions at every possible opportunity in order to obtain the best arms and supplies, to occupy the best strategic positions, to place Communists in key positions, to consolidate Communist cells in all army units, to list the depôts and bases of the

supply organisation, and to suborn the local militias which were being raised to reinforce the regular army. I could go on for days telling you of all the tricks and stratagems we adopted to undermine the position of our allies. *You* know that Communism is merely another name for duplicity, but unless the world soon learns the fact, it will perish of its own obtuseness.

"In the autumn of 1937 Mao called his most reliable subordinates together—I can't tell you how proud I was to be among them—and issued his instructions. They were, roughly, to concentrate seventy per cent. of our efforts on Communist propaganda, twenty per cent. on carrying out the orders of Chiang Kai-shek (with the necessary emendations to our own advantage), and the remaining ten per cent. on fighting the Japanese. The main objective was to penetrate into Central China, which, so far, had remained closed to us; and to make all preparations to overthrow the Kuomintang when the time came. We carried out those instructions to the letter. We would foment disputes; sometimes in order to trip up someone whose behaviour displeased us, at others in order to be able to come forward wearing a patriotic halo as defenders of the sacred union anxious only to settle any differences which might weaken it. We stole arms in order to equip our secret network. Even when the Communist Party is legal, as it was then, it always maintains an illegal apparatus. We spread slander concerning those Kuomintang generals who we knew could see through us; we organised 'popular demonstrations' to greet the regiments of Chiang Kai-shek with shouts of 'Long live Mao!' Our men even went so far as to pass information concerning the movements of certain government units to the Japanese if that promised to result in the elimination of dangerous anti-Communists. No one has ever been so thoroughly bluffed and deceived as the leaders of the Kuomintang were by the Chinese Communists in this supposed sacred union against the Japanese invader."

"No one? You seem to have forgotten Benes. But, never mind; tell me, didn't these perfidies give at least some of your people a bad conscience?"

"Do you think they would? A fanatic has no conscience, and truth means nothing to him. He never thinks of his actions in the light of their actual significance, but only in the light of their aim, the furtherance of the cause. In fact he takes a deep satisfaction in treading ordinary standards of morality underfoot, proudly boasting that he is above bourgeois conventions and prejudices. And in this he was

encouraged and supported by his success in China. After all, he could see the influence of Communism growing rapidly and visibly. The patriotic organisations under our thumb grew stronger all the time; and one of the most active, the Democratic League, even succeeded in getting itself recognised by Roosevelt as a 'responsible national' force; so much so that it was invited to send 'experts' to the Institute for Pacific Affairs in Washington, a body which, as you know, has a semi-official standing. Is it necessary to mention that the 'experts' who were dispatched were under-cover Communists devoted to the interests of the Party? We also resuscitated the old 'Left-Wing of the Kuomintang', a movement we had manipulated since the breach in 1927. I think you can say without exaggeration that it was the Japanese who brought us to power. At the time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, of which, by the way, Mao strongly approved, we felt ourselves at liberty to come more into the open in our struggle against the Kuomintang, which had naturally sided with Paris and London. Although the 1937 alliance was not formally denounced, the latent civil war between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang had resumed in fact and was secretly intensified.

"In 1945 Mao withdrew officially from the National Army with a force four or five times as strong as it was when he entered it. By this time Yen-an was a thorough-going Communist State whose influence extended over three quarters of Shensi and reached out to various parts of China. We had our intelligence apparatus in all important centres and a veritable embassy in Moscow. Already we were beginning to appear on the international scene, and a delegation of American journalists, gulls as usual, came to visit the areas under our control. Needless to say, their visit of inspection was stage-managed by us from beginning to end. When they got back to the United States they published a sensational report in which they declared that we were the only ones seriously fighting the Japanese.

"One event which considerably preceded this incident indicated that the power of the Communist Party was approaching maturity, and that was the wide-scale purge in Yen-an in 1942. Thanks to the second 'Sacred Union' the strength of the Party was now something like 600,000, as against 20,000 on our arrival in Yen-an seven years earlier. Our leaders now considered it necessary to sieve this great mass; get rid of the undesirables, and consolidate the rest in a great purge on Stalinist lines. The occasion was offered by the publication in February 1942 of a novel entitled *The Wild Lilies*. The author was

a young Communist named Wang Shi-wei. As a student he had abandoned his studies in his enthusiasm for Communism and gone off to Yen-an to join us. But by the time he arrived the general atmosphere in Yen-an was already that of a typical Communist State, with censorship, delation, rigid orthodoxy and general suspicion and mistrust. Indignant at what he found, Wang Shi-wei decided to expose it in the form of a novel, and he did. But Mao reacted savagely. He launched a fierce campaign against what he denounced as 'subjectivism' and 'formalism'. A so-called 'literary forum' was convened, and Mao delivered a stern speech which has served ever since as the official terms of reference for art and literature in Communist China. Its rules were identical in all respects to those drawn up by Stalin and his understrapper Zhdanov in the Soviet Union: the complete subordination of art and literature to the Communist Party, 'socialist realism', a 'positive hero' cult in the service of the State, and so on. At first it seemed as though all this referred simply to art and literature, but the subsequent purge cost 10,000 Communists their lives. Once again Mao took a short cut and went straight to the revolver in the medulla stage, a stage which Stalin had arrived at only gradually. It was at this period that Mao began the systematic elimination of the Old Guard, those who had been prominent in Kiangsi and on the 'Long March'.

"It was also at this time that I received the first real shock of my life as a Communist. One of my closest friends, Fong, a man I had got to know and appreciate during the 'Long March', was arrested, charged with 'subjective deviationism' and executed out of hand. At the same time a certain lively and pretty young woman, whose acquaintance I had made on a journey to Peking when she was a young student, and who had come back with me to Yen-an, the only woman I ever loved, fled. She realised more quickly than I did—incidentally, she was related to the unfortunate Wang Shi-wei, who had involuntarily triggered off the purge—that the root cause of all the trouble was Communism itself. I never saw her again—except in imagination, when I would find her smiling face, a little melancholy and a little reproachful, looking out at me from some pompous circular of the Central Committee."

At this point of his narrative Ku had become subdued, and I gave him a little time to shake off the unhappy memories. It was depressing to think that the one idyll in the life of this exemplary Communist militant, the one breath of fresh and gentle air, had been stifled by the obtuse intolerance of the makers of theses and misfortunes.

"In 1944," Ku went on when he had recovered his serenity a little, "it was open civil war again, but this time between State and State. I can go more rapidly from this point until Mao's final victory because it is a story of uninterrupted progress—sometimes slowly, sometimes in great strides—by our troops across the country. I say 'our troops' because the whole thing was essentially a military action. There was even less trace of any spontaneous revolution than there had been in 1930. We carried out the military occupation of an area, imposed our 'agrarian reform' on it, or set up our 'trade unions' if it happened to be industrialised, established our bureaucracy with its whole string of decrees, publications, propaganda campaigns and public trials, and then we passed on to the next area. The cases in which our advance was facilitated by risings in the country ahead of us could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and it happened only in those parts where an already established party core had been able to stir up trouble. Far more numerous were the cases in which we first had to suppress the local militia by armed force because it had remained loyal to the Kuomintang."

"In other words, what you are saying is that the victory of Communism in China was not won by gaining more and more support for its programme, but by force of arms; by the victory of the army of one State over the army of another?"

"Yes. Though, of course, we also gained supporters. But nevertheless it would be truer to say that our power came not from our supporters, but that our supporters came from our power. Perhaps you find that typically Asian?"

I did feel that, but I felt also that it was a phenomenon not unknown in Europe. Not wishing to offend Ku, I sidestepped the question and went back to the fascinating historical story he was unfolding.

"But didn't the victory over Japan strengthen Chiang Kai-shek?"

"Yes, to some extent it did, but not so much as it strengthened us. The Soviet Union entered the war against Japan on August 9, 1945, six days after the end of hostilities. There was no longer any need to fight; it was a walk-over. The first thing the Soviet commanders did was to break the inter-allied agreement by which the Kuomintang regular units were entitled to receive the surrender of the Japanese forces in Manchukuo and China. Instead, they handed that succulent titbit to Mao. That gave Mao first of all prestige and secondly prisoners—with whose possession he blackmailed Japan for the next ten years. And, finally, of course, there was a vast amount of high-quality

Japanese equipment. Chiang's troops had only obsolescent arms and equipment, so the reinforcement of our own arms and equipment with that of the Japanese at once turned the military scale in our favour."

"And, in addition, you came into possession of the richest industrial arsenal of China, in Manchukuo."

"Well, that wasn't as important as it sounds, because before the Soviet Army handed it over to us they had gutted it completely and carried off the machinery and equipment. And when I say 'completely', please understand me literally. A Chinese field is no more bare after a plague of locusts than the factories and workshops of Manchukuo were when they were handed over to us by the Soviet Army. They even ripped up the railway lines, and they dismantled complicated installations and transported them 6,000 miles away—at a cost so great that it would have paid them better to build new ones of their own instead."

"That doesn't surprise me. They did the same thing in Europe in all the countries they occupied. But to go on to something else: during the period from 1944 to 1949, the Americans made various attempts to mediate and restore agreement between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party; didn't those attempts succeed in dampening down the civil war at all?"

"Outwardly, yes, but behind the scenes the struggle went on as before. There were three main stages in that particular pantomime. In 1944 the U.S. General Stilwell arrived in order to put some life into the Chinese theatre of war, which had so far not caused the Japanese much trouble; and for this he wanted the re-establishment of the 'Sacred Union'. You know, there's nothing easier than to lead Americans up the garden path; that's because they have so little understanding of political systems and are inclined to judge everything by the actions of individuals. Because they did not see Chinese Communists strangling Catholic missionaries in the streets, they concluded that the atrocity stories they had heard were invented to denigrate the Communists, who seemed, after all, to be really good fellows with whom you could do a sensible deal. After that, Mao found it a simple matter to deceive Stilwell, and persuade him of the virtues of the Communist Party and the vices of the Kuomintang; in consequence Stilwell's subsequent reports to Washington were very favourable to us.

"After his departure, the U.S. Ambassador Wedemeyer continued the 'good offices' policy though with a greater critical sense, and he

arranged a number of conferences between us and the Kuomintang at various levels—including the summit. However, all this made no real difference to the implacable war we were waging against the Kuomintang. In 1945 Roosevelt sent over one of the most important men in the counsels of the United States, none other than General Marshall himself. But by that time it was too late. Our cause had made great strides, and Stalin and Mao knew how to influence international public opinion, thanks largely to the good offices of that vast army of Fellow Travellers always so anxious to oblige us and especially active in the press. They presented us to the world as more imbued with the philosophy of Confucius than with that of Lenin, as having no particularly close relations with the Soviet Union, and as being anxious only to introduce agrarian reforms, and generally to restore and modernise the country."

"What you say is nothing new to me. I was well acquainted with that literature, and, in fact, I did my best, though in vain, to put my friends on their guard against the soothing lies it propagated. It is quite certain that both Roosevelt and Marshall, of whose intelligence and good will there can be no doubt, fell victim to those lies in a most tragic fashion. Both of them have written things about Communist China which are full of the most distressing errors and the most painful illusions. But on one point I am in some doubt myself, and I should like to hear what you have to say about it: Whilst the reputation of the Communists was lauded to the skies, that of the Kuomintang was blackened as far as possible. We were told that the Kuomintang administration was corrupt to the core, and the most was made of Marshall's discovery that certain Kuomintang officers had sold to the Communists arms supplied by the United States to the Kuomintang."

"There is no doubt that there was corruption in the Kuomintang, but I know, because I personally had a great deal to do with such matters, that in the great majority of cases those American arms weren't 'sold' to us at all, but were obtained by guile in all manner of ways, from robbery pure and simple to the desertion to us of the units supplied with them."

"And then you Communists spread the story that you obtained the arms because of the corruption of this or that Kuomintang colonel. In this way you not only got the arms but slandered your enemies, and all without spending a single penny."

Ku looked at me rather sheepishly.

"That's true," he admitted. "Communists always exploit any

given situation to the utmost, in every possible way. As I was engaged in that sort of thing myself for so long, I hesitate to reveal all I know. But how does it come about that you know so much about the details?"

"For the simple reason that Communists in France use exactly the same methods."

"During the war," Ku went on, "the United States made tremendous efforts to keep its Chinese ally supplied with aid, and all the Communists had to do to get hold of it themselves was to win over one or two accomplices in the right places—and all, as you say, without spending a single penny."

"But the true picture is even worse than that; consider—the Americans were scandalised at the idea that some of the arms they provided for their friend Chiang Kai-shek found their way into the arsenal of their enemy Mao. But a vastly greater quantity of arms—which rightly belonged to the American people, not by virtue of their dollars, but by virtue of the blood they shed during the bitter fighting in the Far East to subdue Japan—in other words, the vast stocks of arms and equipment the Japanese had accumulated in Manchukuo, went completely into the hands of Mao thanks to the duplicity of America's Soviet ally. That's surely a far more crying scandal, isn't it? Compared with that historic piece of treachery, which tipped the whole balance of forces in Mao's favour, how much did the venality of a few officials of the Kuomintang matter? But that didn't prevent the democratic press in the West from loudly condemning the mote in the eye of the Kuomintang while remaining silent about the beam in the eye of the Soviet Union."

"I have often thought over the disappointments and set-backs suffered by the United States in China after the last war. Proceeding on the false assumption that the Soviet Union was 'a country like any other', that is to say, a normal ally which could be expected to honour an arrangement once entered into, Roosevelt, logically following up his erroneous assumption, made great efforts to persuade the Soviet Union to enter the struggle against Japan. But the Soviet Union did not do so until the Americans had won the war on their own account, and the result was that the Soviet Union was in a position to seize the vast quantities of war materials the Japanese had in Manchukuo, and to hand them over to Mao for whom their possession was decisive. I really believe that the *Harbin coup* as we called it, that is to say putting Mao forward instead of Chiang to take the surrender of the Japanese Army, was a breach of agreement on the part of the Soviet Union which

had more far-reaching consequences for the world than all the breaches they indulged in on all other issues taken together."

"Yes, there seems little doubt that, had the Kuomintang, instead of Mao, laid hands on the Japanese armaments, the Kuomintang and not Mao would have won the civil war. In other words, the face of Asia would have been very different today. But let us return to our initial theme. What you say puts the notorious transfer of arms into its proper perspective. But apart from that, what is your view of the question of corruption in the Kuomintang? Was it really as great and far-reaching as we were assured? Or were the stories deliberately exaggerated?"

"I know too much about the way Communist leaders manipulate campaigns of calumny against their opponents to dismiss the hypothesis that the Kuomintang was one of its victims in this respect. However, in my opinion, there was some basis for the charges this time. As I was never a direct eye-witness of any such cases of corruption I can only tell you what the true, not the publicised opinion in Communist circles was. We realised that the leaders of the Kuomintang, Chiang Kai-shek and his lieutenants of the Old Guard, were honest men, and that the same was true of the minor officials and leaders at the other end of the scale, many of whom were still fortified by the example of Sun Yat-sen, whose memory they held in high honour. On the other hand, we did know that certain intermediate officials, and one or two opportunists at the top, had fallen back into the old rut of speculation, intrigue and careerism. Incidentally, our leaders took full advantage of their venality to obtain information, the release of prisoners, safe-conducts and so on."

"If it is true that the intermediate cadres of the Kuomintang were corrupt, that must have aided not only the Communist Party but also the Japanese."

"That's true. But it's also true that the real corruption was not so much in connection with money as politically. It paralysed the will of the Kuomintang more than anything else did. Chiang Kai-shek was obsessed by the memory of the old War Lords, those generals who made themselves independent in the provinces they were appointed to administer. Chang Hsiu-liang had given Chiang a renewed dose of this sort of thing during the Sian Fu incident in 1936. In consequence, Chiang was loth to give such a command to anyone but colourless soldiers who were never likely to strike out on their own but, as against that, such men weren't over-much inclined to fight at all."

"No doubt that was the reason why General Marshall got the impression that the Kuomintang was 'decrepit', an impression which tempered his inclination towards the natural ally of the United States, the Kuomintang, and made him more inclined to believe, without doubting, in the virtues of 'order and dynamism' which it was customary to assign to the Communist Party, a circumstance which operated to undermine his distrust of the natural enemies of the United States, the Chinese Communists."

"That's very true. Chou En-lai, occidentalised, brilliant and engaging, charmed General Marshall, whilst Chiang Kai-shek, as stiff and formal in manner as a Chinese emperor, chilled him. In the end Marshall began to treat the two camps on a footing of equality, and in February 1946 he persuaded them to come together once again in a third agreement for co-operation. This agreement provided for the entry of the Communists into a national government and the election of a Constituent Assembly. However, the agreement was broken almost as soon as it was made, and this time by both sides simultaneously. For one thing, Chiang Kai-shek no longer had any illusions about the Communists, and he immediately took measures 'outside the treaty' to counter the encroachments which the Communists immediately attempted 'under the treaty'. The result was that the agreement was formally abandoned only a few months after its conclusion, and the rupture became final. Needless to say, the movements of Communist troops hardly even slowed down during this new intermezzo.

"Seeing that the old rivalries had started up again Marshall returned to the United States and advised President Truman against giving any further support to Chiang. That was the *coup de grâce* for him. When we arrived on the north bank of the Yangtsekiang in the middle of 1947, the American planes still stationed in China could easily have prevented our crossing that wide stretch of water. Chiang appealed to Washington for assistance, but it was refused. Our troops thus succeeded in crossing the great river, and that was the beginning of the end for Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang.

"The Americans thus rendered Mao a great service but, not surprisingly, they got no thanks for it. In 1946 he began a campaign against the American troops still stationed in China, and the campaign was taken up in the American press, thanks to the contacts Communists have everywhere, and in 1947 Mao had the satisfaction of seeing those troops withdrawn. One year later he proclaimed the

establishment of 'the People's Republic of China'. Six months after that, Chiang Kai-shek, with his remaining forces, withdrew from the mainland to Formosa. Communism was left in sole and undisputed command of the oldest empire in the world.

"In 1949 I was present at the solemn ceremony which proclaimed the national unification of China under the leadership of Mao. I was there as an adviser to the delegations which came into Peking from all parts of the country. I must confess that I was moved, partly perhaps on account of the imposing nature of the demonstrations which were organised. Our accession to power had been too gradual to produce in me that sort of upsurge of emotion which is felt when an upheaval changes the face of things. I already knew, and all the members of the Party already knew, by heart what our State would be, and in consequence there was no particular enthusiasm among us, as there was among the students, who hoped with all the fervour proper to vague ideals that a new dawn was breaking for China with the advent of Communism. However, the fact they turned to us hopefully comforted me a little because it seemed to give warmth and humanity to our theses, things which previously they had sadly lacked.

"In consequence I entered into this new phase, that of our exclusive control, with more zeal than disquiet and I went on to serve the Communist Party in various capacities for another nine years. But from this time on it was a series of heart-breaking disappointments. Despite all my experience I had never realised that there were such profound depths of cruelty, lies and obscurantism in the Party as now opened up and spelt disaster for my unfortunate country. I am a student of Chinese history and I think you must go back to the days of the warring kingdoms 200 years B.C., and to those of the Mongol invasion in A.D. 1300, before you can find the equal of the martyrdom which China is now suffering. Whenever I am compelled to remember that I helped to bring it about it is like a dagger being turned in my heart."

I was struck by the sudden surge of emotion which seized Ku when he came to talk of the period in which China was ruled by the Communist Party. While he was telling me about the gradual rise of the Party to that stage, he had maintained a certain detached calm; but now that he came to describe its actions after its seizure of power he could no longer control his anger and remorse.

As it was already past midday I thought it better to continue my interrogation in the afternoon. The refugee camp in which our

conversation took place being far away from any other habitation, I invited him and our interpreter to join me for lunch. Ku refused politely but very firmly. It is difficult to imagine how obstinate Chinese can be. All my persuasions were useless. Was it perhaps not the thing to be invited to a meal by a lady? Or did Ku think that if he accepted he would be under an obligation to return the hospitality; and as this was out of the question because he was penniless, did he therefore prefer not to accept it in the first place? I just don't know. In any case, he promised to meet me two hours later to continue our conversation.

4

SECOND INTERVIEW WITH THE EX-COMMUNIST KU

WITH a punctuality which I did not know whether to ascribe to Chinese politeness or Communist discipline, the stocky figure of Ku appeared exactly two hours later to continue our conversation as promised. With a smile which was all the more agreeable because it was so rare, he offered me some typically Chinese delicacies.

"I should like you to taste some of our lichis," he said, and it was obviously by way of excuse for not having accepted my invitation to lunch. As he said nothing further I thanked him and we got down to business.

"I should like to question you about the history of the Communist power in China after its total victory," I began, "and I hope that you've recovered your serenity after being so upset this morning."

"I'm sorry about that," he said apologetically. "I certainly did let myself go a bit, but I won't do it again. You have to stop the milk from boiling over, not on account of what goes over the side, but because what remains is no good. During the past two hours I have been thinking over how to tell you about the history of the Chinese Communist power from 1948 to 1958, and I've come to the conclusion that the best thing to do is to divide it into three phases: from 1948 to 1952, the phase of political establishment, marked by what is known as the five movements. Then the phase from 1952 to 1955 and the building up of the new economic structure, marked by the three reforms and the launching of the first Five-Year Plan. And finally the third phase from 1955 on, that of agricultural collectivisation. When this phase is finally over, Chinese Communism will be in the stage of its development corresponding to that in Russia after the great purges—except, of course, that it will have taken Chinese Communism only ten years instead of twenty."

While he was talking I was wondering whether I really had the key to the mystery. Had Ku, a good ex-bureaucrat of the Party, trained for many years to draw up reports and deliver political lectures,

really wanted two hours in which to think the matter over and organise his story better? In any case, I remained silent, a little amused at the Sino-Marxist way in which he divided, sub-divided and numbered everything. Entering into the spirit of the thing I asked:

"What were those five movements you mentioned in your first phase?"

"The agrarian reform, the suppression of the counter-revolution, the reform of thought, the movement of the three antis and then the five antis, and finally the anti-imperialist resistance."

Once more those numbers within numbers, I thought, but I made no comment.

"I have already mentioned the agrarian reform," he went on. "It was now carried out everywhere along the lines of Kiangsi and Yen-an. In 1945 and 1946 the Party was aided by the fact that its administration often replaced the Japanese occupation, and it was therefore in a position to return the land to millions of peasants who had fled before the invader. But in 1947 and the subsequent years it met with a serious difficulty: the Kuomintang, stung by the rivalry of the Communists, began to take measures in favour of the poor peasants: reducing tenant rents, introducing a moratorium for debts, stabilising taxation, and even starting a certain redistribution of landed property. From this time on, the Communist Party was compelled to resort to violence much more than before. It was for this reason that Mao began to use more dramatic methods. For example, the so-called 'rich peasants' were charged with abominable crimes, such as starving the people, raping their female employees, poisoning wells, and ill-treating their labourers. The accused peasants would be brought to public trial, condemned to death by public acclaim and executed immediately. Their land and possessions would be redistributed in the same court session."

"It is difficult to believe that such savagery could win over those masses of peasants who, as you say, were beginning to regain their confidence in the Kuomintang."

"It wasn't a question of winning them over but of intimidating them. Those peasants who had witnessed such so-called 'dramatic operations' were only too glad to be left alone with the land they had been given, or in whose possession they had been confirmed. And the peasants who were too poor to have any heart and spirit became dependent on us and served as informers and agents."

"Did such 'dramatic operations' take place on any really large scale?"

"They took place in their most extreme form in perhaps twenty-five per cent. of the cases, and particularly in the rich provinces of Shantung, Honan and Szechwan, where the population was loyal to the Kuomintang. Perhaps another twenty-five per cent. of the land redistribution took place in a relatively calm atmosphere. In the remaining cases the Party used a mixture of blood and demagoguery ranging from 'peaceful operations' to 'dramatic operations'. Incidentally, when there were not sufficient hands raised at the 'trial' in favour of the execution of the accused, the Communists would carry out mass reprisals against the recalcitrant villagers, sometimes deporting the whole population. I know, because we received the confidential reports from our agents entrusted with the carrying out of the agrarian reform and they left no doubt about the facts."

"The idea of what your 'second movement', the suppression of the counter-revolution, must have been like makes me shudder."

Ku did not answer at once, as though he needed time for consideration before he tackled the subject, but then he began: "You know that whereas our textbooks insist that our movement has primarily an economic basis, in practice we give complete precedence to political action. Marxism, which is our creed, claims that the political superstructure of a society is a reflection of its economic infrastructure, but as far as I am concerned I have never seen the Party act in any way but the exact opposite. In other words, it sought to conquer the political superstructure first, and then re-fashion the economic infrastructure to its own liking. I mention that in order to tell you that, apart from the agrarian reform, Mao at first made little attempt to interfere with the structure of industry and commerce, nationalising only those big factories which had belonged to the Japanese. In this way he lulled the suspicions of industrialists and business men, who went on with their jobs and kept commerce and industry going."

"And at the same time he strengthened the illusion, held very widely abroad, that he was not introducing a monolithic system along Stalinist lines," I put in.

"Yes, and, above all, he was free to concentrate all the efforts of the Party on its primary and essential task, the task which represents the real 'historic mission' of all forms of totalitarianism, namely, the political mopping-up operations. This was the aim of the second of the five movements in this phase: the suppression of the counter-revolution. And this was pursued with unexampled and pitiless rigour. On this point I can give you first-hand information, because I was

instructed to make tours of inspection in the areas which suffered particularly under the terror. It was so terrible that I can think of no historical precedent. My job was to keep the Central Committee informed of the situation and to check the loyalty of those charged with carrying out the operation. My experiences while travelling around on this job were appalling, and this dealt the second blow to my faith in our mission.

"The Red Terror in China was not the result of any 'historical necessity', but of a deliberate bureaucratic decision. It did not evolve, as all other waves of terror have done in the past—including the Red Terror in Russia—from the excesses of a civil war carried on with implacable ruthlessness by both sides, but from a plan previously drawn up and calculated in cold blood and often put into operation before we had even met with any resistance. It was a preventive terror carried out on principle, a sort of monster fabricated by some satanic engineer and let loose on the population at a deliberately planned moment. The Central Committee had divided its already chosen victims into seven categories according to the severity of their offences:

"(1) Former officers and officials of the Kuomintang; and this despite the fact that those who had not been able to flee with Chiang to Formosa were utterly broken and gave not the slightest sign of wishing to do anything but keep quiet. These men were now hounded down and executed *en masse*. Some of them, perhaps one per cent., were kept in reserve to play the role of penitents and model turncoats—and to be executed subsequently when they had served their purpose and were of no further use.

"(2) So-called 'headstrong persons', that is to say, those who used their own judgment and had their own political convictions, and were not prepared to dance to Mao's tune, or not at once, or not with sufficient enthusiasm. This was a very heterogeneous group and it included professors, schoolteachers, journalists, authors, officials of political parties and trade unions, and, above all, those Communist Party veterans whose previous services to the Party had given them a dangerous self-assurance. These latter men were executed in the general reign of terror, very often after deliberate traps had been set for them.

"(3) The members of all secret societies, whatever their objects. You probably know that this sort of organisation has flourished in China for thousands of years. The Communist Party knew—because it had employed such methods itself—that the secrecy, the lodges,

the contacts, the conspiratorial character and the solidarity of such societies might serve to form dangerous cores of resistance, and therefore it pursued them ruthlessly. It pitilessly destroyed all those who had ever taken any part in such secret societies, whatever their aims. And there were such societies of worshippers of all sorts of odd gods, of philosophers, politicians, philatelists, smugglers, drinkers, and heaven knows what else; hosts of them. All were completely destroyed.

“(4) Ex-collaborators with the Japanese, and this category included even those who had simply sold goods to them in ordinary shops, and associated in any way with them and their soldiers. This minor type of collaborator would have asked nothing better than to keep silent, but unfortunately for them they represented perfect execution fodder, and their liquidation enabled the Party to confirm its patriotic reputation, the reputation on which it had based its rise in the years 1935 to 1945.

“(5) Foreign elements. This category embraced foreign missionaries and their converts, and also the representatives of our national minorities. The Party was unable to execute the foreign missionaries out of hand as it could the others, so it contented itself with breaking them morally and physically by torture, calumny and brain-washing, and then deporting them. After which it took over their missionary centres or destroyed them.

“(6) Industrial and commercial enemies. This category included all those industrialists and business men who might form the core of an opposition once the Communist Party decided to go over to the offensive on the industrial and commercial front. The elimination of these men had to be carried out with a certain amount of caution in order not to arouse the suspicion of their colleagues, and this caution gave some of them an opportunity to slip out of the country and thus save their lives.

“And, finally, there was category (7), which consisted of the ‘hesitant’ and the ‘undecided’. A vast category this, and it included all those who had shown any signs of hostility, scepticism or mockery during the course of the various campaigns the Communists had conducted throughout the country at one time or another. Their names had been noted, together with a description of the incidents which suggested their ‘latent hostility’.”

“Have you any idea of the total number of victims who lost their lives in this way?”

"I can't tell you how many people lost their lives in this specific action, but if you include all those who died as a result of similar campaigns, that is to say, throughout the whole period of the terror from 1948 to the end of 1951, the total number of victims is estimated at *fifteen millions*, or about *five per cent. of the adult population*. And that figure isn't a mere guess. In our camp we have set up a commission which works together with the deported missionaries and the British authorities to establish the final figure as accurately as possible by investigating and sifting all the evidence available. During the period I have described to you, I had access to lists of 'counter-revolutionaries' who had to be liquidated, and there were often more than a thousand names for a district with perhaps 50,000 inhabitants. Of course, the intensity of the terror varied from district to district: there were some which enjoyed a relative tranquillity while others suffered very heavily. In certain extreme cases where the suspects in all seven categories represented a majority of the population we just deported the whole population."

"Even so," I said, "it would seem that the Communist Party of China did not achieve the figures of Stalin and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, since the victims of the Stalinist terror are placed at a total of twenty millions with a population only a third of yours."

"One moment! Those Soviet figures include *all* the victims, not only those who were actually executed; for example, the victims of the so-called de-kulakisation and of the forced collectivisation, and all those who died of famine in consequence of it. But if you count only the actual political victims, those who were actually shot or who died in the forced-labour camps, the figure in Russia amounts to only eight millions. At the same time, if you include all the victims of Mao's régime in China—those who died of famine as a result of its economic repression as well as the direct victims of its political terror—then you will get a total of something like *forty millions*."¹

¹ The figure given by Ku is in general agreement with expert estimates. The International Commission on Concentration Camps, whose conclusions were based on very thorough investigations, reckoned that the total number of people in concentration camps in China in 1954 was 20,500,000. Since then, further waves of terror (agricultural collectivisation, the suppression of the artisanate, and the persecution of the right-wingers) have swept a further 10,000,000 Chinese into those camps. Half of this total have since died of hunger or maltreatment and disease: something like 15,000,000 people. In addition, a further number of at least 10,000,000 ex-kulaks, artisans, small business men and other victims of collectivisation have died from starvation

I felt sick and giddy as I listened to the flood of these macabre figures. Ku's words confirmed the existence of that law which sickens the heart to such an extent that the brain has difficulty in assimilating the truth; the law that the establishment of Communism in any country involves a gigantic blood bath costing the lives of ten per cent. of the population. *Ten per cent!* In France, for example, that would mean four million victims. The Jacobin terror has shocked and horrified the world for the past 150 years because it cost the lives of 10,000, and that number represented only 0.5 per cent. of the population. Terrible indeed, but a percentage 200 times less than that of the Communist terror! And to think that in face of that vastly greater Communist terror and cruelty the reprobation of mankind has been infinitely less! To think that millions of our contemporaries even admire the organisers of these hecatombs! To think that our perverted intellectuals devoted to "progressivism" dare to compare the Communist terror to that of the Jacobins! To think that they even dare to present us with pompous "*avantgarde*" theses to explain that such "revolutionary" eruptions are "inevitable birth pains" of new social systems inscribed in history while it is obvious that, should a new social system be really inscribed in history, its birth would not require such hecatombs of corpses! On the contrary, what we have witnessed is not a revolution, but the most virulent counter-revolution in history, a ruthless attempt to destroy that seed of all human civilisation: liberty. And as Ku recounted his memories the evidence piled up higher and higher, increasing my horror of the murderers and my contempt for their intellectual panders, and making that poor refugee camp in the afternoon sunshine look, as pitiful as it really was, something like a haven of human fraternity.

"How was this fantastic massacre carried out technically?" I demanded.

as a result of economic expropriation. Finally, the Hongkong Study Commission has drawn up the following figures of people actually executed, basing its figures on official Chinese admissions and a study of the Chinese Communist press, the categories being designated by their official names in Peking documents:

"Rich peasants and landowners"	.	.	.	4,500,000
"Bandits and anti-social elements"	.	.	.	5,300,000
"Reactionaries"	.	.	.	2,750,000
"Spies"	.	.	.	450,000
"Miscellaneous"	.	.	.	2,700,000

Grand total	.	.	.	15,700,000
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"Simply by shooting," he replied. "After a so-called 'people's trial'. And then by deportation. Frenchmen suffered the Nazi occupation, and they know how many deaths can be caused by forcing people to overwork, by under-feeding them, by herding them together in overcrowded concentration camps. A life like that soon makes a walking skeleton of a man, and then a corpse. The special feature of the Chinese terror, a real innovation, was the introduction of the so-called 'people's trial', at which moral and physical suffering complement and intensify each other. The place—village, street, factory or university—chosen for the bloodletting would be occupied a few days before by a special group of activists. We used to call them the 'tigers'. Three or four of the most sadistic and ruthless would attend to the accused, while the others arranged the 'trial'. The victims would be hauled out of their beds at night and taken away to be beaten, humiliated, insulted and spat upon. Some of them would already have been in prison for weeks or months, treated to alternate physical cruelty and brain-washing. Our 'tigers' would finish off the process, and when they were 'ripe' the prisoners would be driven off for 'judgment'.

"This usually took place in the open air. The 'tribunal' would be seated at a table; and, of course, it consisted of Party activists with one or two complaisant supernumeraries, and if possible some person with some sort of judicial experience, a retired judge, a clerk of the court, or even just a court bailiff, in order to lend some sort of legal colour to the proceedings. You could easily see that these latter individuals were ill at ease, but they quickly learned to put the best possible legal face on it. A mass of people, herded together by our activists and suitably stirred up, would be sitting on benches or on the floor. A hideous affair, which I had to witness so many times! Previously, I had often despaired of my people because of their lack of go and energy, but I had always liked and admired them for their amiability and their fundamental decency. Confucius didn't teach them to roll up their sleeves and deal with their constantly overflowing rivers, but at least he did teach them to respect the rights of their neighbours. And now imagine what I had to see on the faces of those sons of Confucius, faces like my own! Fierce hatred towards their brothers in distress. In fact, however, it was a manufactured hatred, stemming from deep-seated fear; they knew that there were observers told to watch the behaviour of the 'people's jury' and to note any lack of enthusiasm or signs of compassion. But how swiftly

can mob passions be stirred up! I have seen peasants in remote, out-of-the-way places, who had never even seen our troops before, shrieking 'enemy of the people!' or 'counter-revolutionary jackal', or 'imperialist lackey', after only half an hour's tutelage.

"Amidst roars of execration the accused would be placed on a platform facing the 'jury', his hands tied or chained behind his back, his head bowed—often he was forced to his knees. And there he would recite the list of his supposed crimes, prompted if necessary by the members of the 'tribunal'. Not only his 'crimes' against the revolution, but also the failings of his private life. And in conclusion he would beg pardon for his crimes, thank the people for having brought him to see his infamy in a proper light, and for having been good enough to come together to give him a fair trial. Then some member of the tribunal would demand: 'What is the only possible punishment for this man's crimes? Death, of course.' And at that everyone present would shout wildly: 'Death!' This would be the 'popular sentence'. The wretched man would then be executed on the spot with a bullet at the base of his brain, often in front of the grave he had been compelled to dig himself."

Up to now Ku had told his terrible story in a monotonous voice, his shoulders drooping as though under the burden of those horrible memories. But now he straightened himself and his voice began to tremble with emotion. "Again and again, from every book, every scholar, every visitor to this camp, and every cell of my own brain, I've tried to find an answer to the same question: did such things ever happen in the world before? And I've never been able to find a precedent to lighten the burden of my shame. How can I admit, how can I understand, that those 'tigers' were my comrades, that they served the same cause as I did? Where did they come from? Revolutions are like trees; they are judged not by their seed but by their fruits; not by the men who prepare them, but by the men they produce. I remember on one occasion witnessing an outburst of rage from the leader of one of those squads. He was the secretary of a Communist cell in Hankow. One of his subordinates had come up against a victim who, God alone knows how, had managed to maintain his dignity so that his executioner was moved to show him a little respect. Therefore he put him upright before a firing squad instead of making him kneel and then blowing out his brains with a bullet at the base of the skull. 'A firing squad!' the angry leader bawled. 'You're getting big ideas aren't you? A firing squad in a rational Communist régime! The Party

will not tolerate such waste. A ball in the nape of the neck; that's our law. One neck, one ball. Those wasted bullets would have done for other counter-revolutionaries.' "

Ku's eyes had gone blank again, and he no longer saw anything around him, only the memories which haunted him. His voice was low and monotonous again as he went on:

"And then, one evening after just such a scene in the Hupei district, that crack first showed in the metal of my career which was to break it altogether later on. The mob had dispersed and gone home, its shouting for blood finished for the day. This time there were no open graves and the bodies were to be dragged to a near-by ravine and toppled into it. But for some reason or other the activists had gone off leaving the job to be done the next day. Those bodies lying there in the rapidly gathering dusk like disjointed puppets in an obscene caricature of life obsessed me, and I went up with the intention of pushing them into the ravine. As I approached I was astonished to find that one body was moving. It was a slender young woman who had somehow been spared. Her hands were no longer chained, because after execution the chains are taken off to serve for others. She was weak and she moaned softly. And everything human since Adam and Eve was in her eyes as she looked at me imploringly. It was dark now and there was no one around. Hastily I went to get some food, and I brought back a small bag of rice which I hung from her shoulder. At the same time I gave her a little money and then helped her to get away down the side of the ravine. After that I looked carefully all around to make certain that no one had witnessed the scene, and only when her frail shadow had disappeared did I go away."

"How was it that this incident ultimately ended your career?" I asked.

"I will tell you when I get that far," he replied. "For the moment—with your permission—let us go on to the third of the five movements of the first phase: the reform of thought."

"What an expression!" I exclaimed. "And what an admission it contains! According to Marx, a social system crumbles when men's minds have turned away from it. The idea of a new society forms first, and then the revolution translates it into reality. But here's Mao telling us that he made a revolution first, and then busied himself reforming China's thought to fit his revolution. It would be difficult to find any stronger confirmation of what you have already told me: that there was nothing authentic about that revolution; that it was imposed on the Chinese people, and not made by them."

"It's still more blatant when you consider that nowhere at any time was any idea of 'reform' uttered or written which had not first been carefully thought out and adjusted down to the last inch by the Communist Party. And as for the nature of this 'reform of thought', it was incredibly primitive. The 'movement' was like a vast infants' class in which the entire nation was brought together to recite the name of Mao when teacher pointed to it written on the blackboard. Everywhere, in the most outlying hamlets, in the mines, the hospitals, the laboratories, the fisheries, the shops, the ministries, the factories and the fields, six hundred million Chinese were assembled two or three times a week to hear and repeat out loud the name of their good friend and the name of their wicked enemy; to hear and repeat why all personal interests had to be sacrificed to the cause of Socialism; to hear and repeat the good will of the Soviet Union towards them and the malice of the United States; to hear and repeat the excellences of the Communist Party. And so on. Communist slogans were deciphered collectively. The portraits of the new leaders were displayed, together with fulsome descriptions of their virtues. 'Traitors' were produced to avow their turpitude. Pantomimes were performed with Chiang Kai-shek in the role of the wicked ogre slain in the end by the doughty champion of the people, Mao. And there were special groups of propagandists who were sent round to burst in here, there and everywhere, into homes, factories, offices and public markets, to watch what people were doing and then tell them to do it differently, 'correctly', according to the new 'norms'. Fishermen were told to put to sea again because all they had cared to catch were luxury fish to be sold at high prices to the rich; teachers were told to start again because they had mentioned a long-dead author without explaining his class status—and so on and so on, without end in space, or in time, or in stupidity.

"But the movement did not confine itself to that kind of lunacy, which was more stupid than it was malicious, which is saying something. It also savagely harassed those many 'waverers' who, instead of being executed as counter-revolutionaries, were held in reserve to play the role of repentant sinners in public. These were the people who suffered the new Communist technique of brain-washing, the remodelling of personality; a real innovation of Chinese Communism under Mao's leadership. But if you want to know more about that, I suggest you question some of the refugees here who suffered it."

"I most certainly shall."

"They will be in a position to tell you more about it than I can. But let me just finish what I have to say about that immense campaign for the 'reform of thought' by telling you that the hours it lost for ten million indoctrinators and 590 million indoctrinated would have been sufficient, properly used, to build embankments along the whole length and on both sides of the Yangtsekiang and the Yellow River."

"You're exaggerating!"

"I'm not. The calculation was actually made."

"That fantastic price paid by the Chinese Communist revolution in an effort to capture the human spirit only shows how necessary it must have been in the first place. It's a well-known fact that the less a suitor pleases his beloved the more it costs him to ingratiate himself in her favours."

"And then, at the best, he gets only her body and not her heart. And so it was with Mao; despite all the immense efforts put into this so-called 'reform of thought' all he taught the people was to babble his new jargon obediently; he did not succeed in persuading them to believe it and to love his new institutions. However, to possess people's bodies is enough for Mao. He doesn't care much whether they love him or not. But he needs their bodies at his absolute disposal. And that was the aim of the fourth movement, that of the three antis and the five antis."

"Why not just the eight antis?"

"Because the movement had two quite distinct periods. At first it had only three antis, and they directly concerned the cadres of the Party itself: anti-corruption, anti-waste and anti-bureaucracy. You might suppose that it was merely an administrative clean-up, a new broom, to sweep clean the Communist offices, where self-seeking careerism and bureaucracy had developed alarmingly. But it was something more serious than that, and tens of thousands of Communist officials came under the axe and were deported to distant places. Of course, tens of thousands is a mere flea-bite for a Communist purge. That phase of the three antis was called the *Soufan*. But before long further antis were invented, this time against the people who had to do with the administration from outside; and on January 1, 1952, Chou En-lai launched the second stage of the movement, the so-called *Woufan*, with its five antis which concerned such crimes as could be committed by ordinary citizens as well as by officials and civil servants: bribery, the sabotage of production and the wasting of

national resources, tax dodging, the theft of public funds, and the betrayal of State secrets."

"I must say that's an impressive catalogue, a redoubtable indictment with a great variety of cutting edges. But tell me, how did you manage to keep them all apart: the first three antis and the second five antis?"

"It wasn't, in fact, easy for activists, I can tell you. Before long the instructions we received showed very quickly that the whole thing was merely the preliminary run of the steam-roller which was ultimately to crush out of existence that whole class of industrialists, employers and business men which Mao had left more or less in peace until then. It was our job to soften them up, using various degrees of pressure, from public humiliations to public executions. They had to be intimidated, threatened and morally broken by a course of treatment worked out for us in a hundred different ways and grouped according to kind and intensity. The five antis were invented to serve, so to speak, as indictment headings for our persecutions. Before long the movement took on the character of a really big campaign. From the spring of 1952 on we began to train employees to badger and cross-question their employers in the most humiliating fashion in order to force them to convict themselves under, say, at least one 'anti' heading. We were rewarded according to the number of 'confessions' we obtained in this way; like children in the country are paid so much for each rat's tail.

"Poetry competitions and posters listed the faults aimed at by the 'antis' and brought in hundreds of thousands of 'competitors'. The numbers of the persecuted swelled like a river in flood, and I can remember some of the figures. For example, in 1952 there were 680,000 cases in Tientsin, 230,000 in Chungking, 150,000 in Peking, and 800,000 in Shanghai. Over a million industrialists, merchants and independent artisans were arrested, deported or shot throughout the country. And the numbers of those who committed suicide ran into many tens of thousands more. At the same time the amount of money and capital seized in the form of 'restitution' for their 'capitalist brigandage' was very considerable. There the brake had to be put on, for fear of killing the goose that laid the golden eggs. The idea was to intimidate the bourgeoisie and give them a salutary shock, but the time for their complete liquidation hadn't yet arrived."

"I see. But tell me: leaving out the usual exaggerations of the Communist Party, wasn't there nevertheless perhaps something good

at the bottom of it all? After all, you yourself complained bitterly of the traditional, almost ancestral, scourge of corruption in China. And one of the main arguments of Mao's many supporters in the West is that for the first time in history he has given China an honest administration. Is there any truth in that?"

"Well, there's both truth and falsehood in it. It is, for example, quite true that the Communist Party has made great efforts—and taken the lives of very many people—in order to root out corruption; and to some extent it has succeeded in wiping out the endemic forms; the small change of corruption, as it were. But corruption on the grand scale remains, because the Communist terror coupled with bureaucratic despotism leaves moneyed people no other possibility but to attempt to save their lives by buying off prominent officials. For example, the Peking press is constantly 'discovering' new abuses, and just before I fled there was the corruption in connection with ancestral tombs. . . ."

"I heard something about that on the radio. I must say it was something new in the way of corruption."

"And yet it was inevitable. First of all, the number of deaths from non-natural causes had increased unbelievably, and this, coupled with the tremendous importance the Chinese attach to their burial places, led to this particular kind of corruption. Incidentally, it would be difficult to think of anything more revealing. The Communists have turned a country in which sons suborned mandarins in order to secure pensions for their fathers, into a country in which fathers suborn Communist bureaucrats in order to obtain proper burial places for their sons."

"But could one say that on the whole there was less corruption in Communist China?"

"I think one probably could. You see, the essential motive of the Communist leaders was *power* rather than morality; and the fact is that corruption always involves indiscipline, and discipline is more important than morals. But if officials no longer go in for fiddling with the resources of the people merely in order to stick closer to the Party line, and the Party line cruelly oppresses the people, just how much has really been gained?"

"Quite so, but those enthusiastic friends of Mao's who live at a safe distance and suffer none of the cruelties of his régime can hardly contain themselves at the thought of its incorruptibility. As you know, the twentieth century worships toughness, and not charity as the

nineteenth century did, so that to be able to say that Communists are 'harsh but incorruptible' opens up an inexhaustible source of credit to them."

"Their hands may be reasonably clean where money is concerned," admitted Ku, "but they are certainly stained with the blood of countless innocents."

"Let us go on to the fifth and final movement you mentioned."

"That was against imperialism. The war in Korea provided the pretext, and allowed the Communists to multiply those 'practical tasks' with which they love to lace their campaigns."

"What 'practical tasks' for example?"

"Collections on behalf of the North Koreans, extra unpaid overtime in the factories to produce more munitions for them, to send them medical supplies, and so on. And then, of course, the recruitment of volunteers. Need I say that there wasn't much volunteering, and that it was all done under pressure? At the end of a public meeting one of the kanpous would get up and say: 'I now propose that everyone present at this meeting should contribute to the cause of the gallant Korean people.' Frantic applause would naturally follow this, and then the collectors would go round—and no one would dare not to contribute. The same thing applied to all those 'voluntary decisions' to work unpaid overtime for 'our Korean brothers'. A show of hands would be taken and the decision would be declared unanimous. In any case, not a soul would have dared not to vote in favour—let alone vote against! Then there would be organised youth meetings at which fiery speeches would be delivered and rousing songs sung. And at the appropriate moment the chairman would shout: 'Comrades! Are we going to allow the American jackals to crush our Korean brothers?' Immediately the audience would roar 'No!' and that, of course, was 'volunteering' for the fight, so immediately afterwards the 'recruiting officers' held in reserve would get to work and rope in the volunteers.

"Nevertheless, despite all the pressure of the Communist Party and the obligatory character of the campaign in support of North Korea, it is a fact that it was the one and only campaign which really did find an echo amongst the masses. On one occasion, at Siangyang, a town in Central China, I actually witnessed a delegation arrive unexpectedly at a mass meeting; usually all these 'spontaneous' delegations have been carefully arranged by the Party in advance. The spontaneity of the incident expressed itself in a really Chinese fashion, something which I had not experienced for a very long time, because

everything Communist lacks national character. A band of Taoist hermits had come down from the hills to present us with an ode to be sent to our soldiers, written in beautiful characters on a handsome scroll, and abounding in elevated patriotic and honourable maxims recalling China's past glory. As the ode was not written in the proper jargon, I rather felt that the well-meaning hermits were putting a rod in pickle for themselves, to be used at some later date for their own backs, when the time came to denounce them for their 'reactionary subjectivism', but for the moment all was well. And then there were strolling players, jugglers and so on, who really did volunteer to amuse the troops. There were also groups of women who were indiscreet enough to document their attachment to 'feudal prejudices' by once again making the traditional 'safety girdles'—lengths of stuff embroidered with talismans which the heroes put round their waists before going into battle in order to make them invulnerable.

"By the way, it wasn't long before we understood the reason for these timid manifestations of real popular feeling in connection with the Korean War. These people, learning that Chinese troops were going off to fight for Korea, imagined it was to conquer Korea for China, and this represented the fulfilment of an age-old Chinese nationalist ambition. In other words, the only time when the Communists really succeeded in producing an echo amongst the Chinese people it was diametrically opposed to their official thesis; namely, that the Chinese people were giving completely disinterested assistance to their 'Korean brothers'.

"Another feature of this particular movement was that the official lies reached a simply prodigious magnitude. The invasion of South Korea by the Communist North—an overwhelmingly obvious historical fact, frankly admitted amongst the Communist leaders themselves—was distorted into the exact opposite for popular consumption. The whole Communist propaganda apparatus rolled into movement, and the Chinese people were bombarded with an intensive campaign of lies, 'eye-witness' reports, supported with photographs, to make them believe that Syngman Rhee's soldiers (most of whom were said to be Americans with faces painted yellow and disguised as Koreans) had savagely and without the slightest warning invaded North Korea and attacked schools and burned hospitals. Then came the gigantic swindle about bacteriological warfare, probably one of the vastest hoaxes ever perpetrated. It even went to the extent of persuading people to wear masks over their mouths and noses to protect

them from 'American bacteriological infection', and notices were put up in hospitals to the effect that they were treating patients already infected in this way. At the same time a few wells and fields were deliberately infected, and then Western scientists—carefully chosen friends of Mao, of course—were invited from all parts of the world to come and see for themselves. On the other hand, when our Chinese soldiers were taken prisoner by the enemy eighty-five per cent. of them gave the game away, opted against Mao, and demanded to be sent to Formosa to join Chiang Kai-shek."

"That's true, and highly significant, but it happens to be a fact to which the greater part of the Western world deliberately closed both eyes and ears."

"It shook us, I can tell you; and the Party, which was really deeply disturbed to see its mask of 'popularity' slipping so badly, had to make tremendous efforts to create a diversion; so it now put out the story that Syngman Rhee was handing our men over to Chiang Kai-shek's torturers in order to force them to opt for Formosa. When they agreed under torture they were, it was said, chained together like galley slaves and transported, battened down in the holds of ships, to Formosa. Not a single word has ever been said in China about the investigators appointed by the United Nations. There was just a complete black-out. It convinced me that the Party could say anything it liked without fear of contradiction, no matter how fantastic, and it would always find people to believe it—for example that packs of wolves were devouring the homeless and the starving in the streets of New York."

"As Communists are used to remodelling the society they dominate in accordance with their good pleasure, so they think they can do the same with the societies outside their control. Therefore every country they rule, China, the Soviet Union, Hungary and so on, is falsified to the core. But our time is slipping away; do you think we could go on to the 'second phase' now?"

"Certainly. This extended from 1952 to 1955, and its chief aim was to obtain complete control of the economic system, which had been left to tick over more or less on its own during the first phase, in which all the energies of the Party were concentrated on the political mopping-up operations. This period was marked by the *three big reforms*: the establishment of agricultural co-operatives; the nationalisation of small-scale manufacture, the artisanate; and the nationalisation of private industry. In addition there were the *three large-scale undertakings*:

launched in this second phase: the first Five-Year Plan; the Public Health and Hygiene Plan; and the colonisation of the frontier marches.

"Before describing these operations to you, I must make a confession. At the end of the first phase, I felt tired and disgusted; but in the second phase I recovered a certain attachment—I won't say to the Party, which I was now serving with no more enthusiasm than a disgruntled employee serves his employer—but at least to my country. And yet this second phase was quite as strongly marked by official cruelty as the first. But the fact is that we Communists were so enamoured of our Marxist ideas that as soon as the time came to make 'plans', to mix cement and to nationalise factories, we forgot all the sufferings we were imposing on the people, and once again we proudly felt ourselves to be the architects of history, the builders of a new world, morally rehabilitated by the grandeur of our task. Now, where shall I start: with the *three reforms* or the *three undertakings*?"

"Provided the count fits to three he will be happy," I thought, so I said: "With the *three reforms*, if that suits you."

"Very well. Of those three the most perfidious was that which dealt with capitalists. I have already told you how, at the beginning of the revolution, the Party reassured them with fair words. Now the time had come to deprive them of everything they possessed, and this was done by a piece of cunning trickery which went under the name of 'Joint Public and Private Management'. The first circulars issued by the Party recommended us to take gradual enveloping measures with a view to demoralising the capitalists. First of all we were to examine their books. If we discovered irregularities, so much the better; if not we were to interpolate them. On this basis they were to be handed over to the police and given a foretaste of what life in Communist prisons was like. Their supplies were to be cut down and their deliveries sabotaged, while at the same time they were to be compelled to retain all their employees and pay them in full. We were also to claim for taxes in arrears, up to a period of twenty-five years. And so on. In fact the Party revealed an almost incredible fertility in inventing tricks to harass an employer and break him down completely within a matter of six months or so; and every bit as effectively as though he had been physically tortured.

"All these persecutions were carried out according to a carefully prepared plan. I heard about the details of this planning through an old comrade of mine whom I had lost sight of since 1944, at which time he was transferred from the fighting forces to the administration.

He told me that since 1947, that is to say well before the Party took full power in the land, he had been a member of a secret group whose job it was to draw up lists of those employers who were to be tackled first when the time came. Employers and capitalists were classed according to districts, their importance, their trades and their families. When all these preparations had been concluded, the time came to turn on the heat, and then Mao invited representatives of industry, the banks, the big department stores, and so on, for a 'Round-Table Conference', in which he explained to them that the State was now going to become a partner in their businesses. Their property titles were to be taken over by purchase at their market value, and payment was to be made over periods of fifteen to twenty years, and these payments would provide them with excellent pensions. They would retain a directing position in their undertakings in return for appropriate salaries and even a share in the profits.

"In face of such great generosity, the grateful representatives of industry, banking and commerce went back to their principals and confidently recommended the acceptance of this 'magnanimous plan', which was then adopted at a conference of the National Federation of Industry and Commerce, an employers' organisation which the Communist Party had allowed to continue in existence, though under strict control. Once again I suppose it is hardly necessary for me to add that the plan was adopted 'unanimously and with acclamation'?

"After that came the 'ideological campaign', that is to say the storm which invariably accompanies the maturing of all 'the historical reforms' brewed by the Party. Certain undertakings were singled out for the full treatment immediately; crosses were marked on the factories and buildings, and posters depicting 'the bad capitalists' were stuck on the walls of their homes. In addition to this 'moral bombardment', many arrests were carried out. Within a few months the 'Plan for Joint Public and Private Management of Industry and Commerce' had been carried out everywhere. The newspapers were full of bulletins reporting the progress of the campaign: 'On January 23 the Joint-Management Plan was completed in . . . ' this or that district. 'On January 25 . . . ' this or that district was lagging behind in the carrying out of the Plan, but the local authorities had come together at the request of the Party and they now promised that the Plan would be fulfilled within five days. . . . And so on."

"But how could anyone promise to carry out complex economic operations extending over large areas within a matter of days?"

"The Party had a very simple recipe for this. On a certain agreed day, all the capitalists of a district would be convened at the appeal of 'the more conscientious amongst them', and at this meeting they would adopt a resolution calling on the Party to 'deliver them of their possessions at once, take them into the hands of the people, and relieve the owners of their present indignity'. This resolution would then be carried in procession to the local headquarters of the Party, or the administration. Specially prepared banners would also be carried, listing their possessions, setting out their revenues and confessing their capitalist misdeeds. The Party, or other local authorities, would be 'surprised and delighted' at this unexpected triumph of the New Order over the Old Adam, and they would accept the resolution, promising to study it carefully. It would, of course, not take them long to 'study' it, and the next day the request would be granted. The date of this 'historic gesture' would then be recorded as the date on which the Plan was completed."

"That's all very interesting, and it provides the appropriate background to the report of M. Daniel Mayer, who is now the President of the French League for the Rights of Man. He visited China at the request of Mao, and he too came back 'surprised and delighted', as he put it, because he had seen former bourgeois in China 'working conscientiously' to bring about their own disappearance as a class. What he saw was presumably a piece of the stage-management you have just described. Seen from close up, as you saw it, it wouldn't look so good, but from M. Mayer's balcony seat it no doubt seemed very edifying."

"M. Mayer was undoubtedly brought into touch with some of those 'capitalist suicidees' as we called them. These were people specially worked on and prepared for showing to foreign visitors. And nevertheless it seems astonishing that he didn't see through the trick. Still, the thing is certainly very carefully prepared. These 'auto-ex-proprietors' are men who have been so carefully enmeshed, and so thoroughly terrorised, that they live suspended on the whim of the Party; in addition their families are held as hostages for their 'good behaviour'. They are living dead men, supernumeraries, stones so carefully cut and polished that when the Party drops them into the water they do not even make a noise. They were specially trained to do their tricks for the edification of foreign delegations. The Incas used such types too."

"And was this sort of thing general? Was the same comedy—

capitalists begging to be deprived of their possessions in order to become honest men—staged everywhere?”

“Yes. When you’ve prepared a thing with such care, you don’t change it. In my province there were 11,647 such requests for expropriation made to 11,647 Communist Party committees, and in 11,647 cases the request was condescendingly granted. Remarkable unanimity, wasn’t it?”

“Too remarkable, indeed. Did no one find it extraordinary that the unanimity was always complete?”

“Of course not. Everyone applauded. In any case, what was there really so extraordinary about it? There’s only one ‘historic process’, isn’t there? And there’s only one Party to interpret it. It is therefore a matter of course that the Party always says what’s true, and always does what’s right. Do the stars ever deceive the navigator? Uncertainty arises only when clouds cover the sky and conceal the stars, or when there are several navigators and they disagree. But the Communist Party carefully sees to it that there’s only one navigator—and no clouds. Thus there is nothing astonishing about the fact that through the wise mediation of the Party the star of history shines on all with the same refulgence.”

“But after the Party had accepted these, so to speak, suicide pacts, were the obligations undertaken towards these capitalists honoured?”

“Yes, provided you put the accurate interpretation on the word ‘honoured’; *i.e.* a dialectical interpretation. This amounts to saying that these payments, which were to be made over periods of fifteen and twenty years in return for the secession of all rights, were cancelled out because of the sudden discovery of arrears of taxes; it would be found, one day, that the capitalists in question had failed to pay their proper taxes, also over the past fifteen to twenty years. Incidentally, the discovery was invariably made by the capitalist himself after the usual bout of ‘brain-washing’, or ‘moral bombardment’. Within a very short space of time the ex-capitalist, now become a joint manager with the State, would, if he were lucky that is, find himself exercising his executive abilities somewhere in the packing department.”

“But why was all this crooked performance considered necessary? Why were all these comedies staged? Why did the Communist Party feel that it had to strike these generous attitudes when its aim was spoliation pure and simple? Why these mass efforts, meetings and

resolutions? Why were these creaking wheels set into motion? Why this farcical performance of rich men begging the people to deprive them of their riches? Why didn't the Chinese Communist Party go straight to its aim and dispossess the capitalists without bothering with all this complicated procedure of deceit—in the same way, for example, as the Bolsheviks did?"

"Just one moment! Only at first did the Bolsheviks act clearly. In the second revolution—or counter-revolution if you prefer it—that is to say from 1929 on, Stalin also made the Russian people swallow dirt. And how! Remember the public trials of the surviving leaders of the revolution, who were forced to make false confessions to incriminate themselves of the most fantastic crimes, to abase themselves abysmally, whilst at the same time praising their torturers to the skies. However, I agree with you that the Chinese Communist Party has gone a stage or two even further with the fraud; and that, I think, is due to a number of factors: the normal improvement in the technique of that kind performance, too impetuous planning; and, perhaps, the influence of a certain national characteristic which has affected them almost without their knowing it. For example, in the days of the Chinese emperors, it was customary for even their most arbitrary actions to be lauded at court under a tremendous display of sententious moralising."

"Perhaps you are right. In any case, what do you think is the result of this reform so far?"

"The complete elimination of the private employer in industry. As a result of the carrying out of this so-called Plan for Joint Management, the Party has, in the words of Mao, passed through another stage towards a superior form of economic system by decreeing the total expropriation of all private enterprises by the State. The former owners have been executed, deported, or reduced to a very subordinate rank in their own undertakings. Today the factories, the banks, the big commercial undertakings and so on, are all in the hands of State trusts. In other words, the system is that of State capitalism in its most extreme form."

"What about smaller commercial undertakings, family businesses, artisan workshops and so on?"

"That's exactly where the second reform comes in. This Chinese State capitalism has extended its operations to include these small businesses by grouping all merchants, tradesmen, small producers, etc., into so-called 'public co-operatives'. You already know enough

about the methods adopted by the Party to guess immediately how this particular reform was carried out. It was more difficult to manage than the first, because far more people and far more businesses were involved, and they were far more widely dispersed. For example, in 1950, what may be called the artisanate was three times more economically important in China than industry. As it was impossible to group all these businesses into factories and workshops, the Chinese Communist Party adopted the Soviet Russian system. Each artisan ceded the ownership of his tools, etc., to a co-operative, whilst actually retaining them in his possession. Incidentally, the expression 'co-operative' is quite out of place here, because they are State-run organisations whose 'members' have no control whatever and just have to do as they're told. The so-called co-operative takes the orders and deals with the customers; all the artisan has to do is to carry out the orders of the co-operative at the rate it fixes.

"The member not only has to supply his labour to the co-operative, but he also has to make his purchases through it. In such circumstances production naturally fell considerably, and the simplest jobs, such as shoeing a buffalo, repairing a pair of shoes, or mending a pot became bureaucratically involved undertakings. There was, of course, a good deal of resistance, some of it desperate. Before long, one of the most important tasks of the local police was the suppression of the artisan Black Market, that is to say, jobs done on the sly outside the co-operatives. Artisans arrested for this offence soon formed one of the biggest contingents amongst the deportees. There were probably something like two million of them. The ultimate aim of the whole procedure was to abolish the artisan class altogether, because it was the class *par excellence* in which the ancient Chinese traditions survived most tenaciously: a respect for neighbours' rights, and, in particular, a certain independence of the powers that be."

"Which now brings us to the third reform of the second phase: co-operation in agriculture. Hadn't it the same object as the third phase?"

"No. The third phase, which began on July 20, 1955, concerned the true *collectivisation* of the land, whereas the third reform of the second phase, which lasted from 1952 to 1955, confined itself to establishing co-operatives to bring the control of buying and selling agricultural produce into the hands of agents of the Party. The requisition of agricultural produce by the State at low fixed prices was becoming more and more difficult with those peasants who had become

individual owners of land. In addition, the old social differentiations were developing again at an alarming speed: five years after the general agrarian reform there were once more rich peasants and poor peasants; clandestine sales of land were taking place; and the more prosperous peasants were already establishing business contacts even with the towns. Now Communism, of course, had encouraged this phenomenon only in order to make its own seizure of power easier, and to feed its bureaucracy in the very difficult post-war period. But, as I have said before, from the very beginning the Communist Party was determined to take back the land it had distributed, and this new reform under the title of 'co-operation' was aimed solely at preparing the way for the ultimate total collectivisation of agriculture."

"Did this reform meet with as much resistance as the similar reform did with the artisans?"

"It certainly did; but not so openly. The artisan in China is much more socially developed, much more conscious of his role, and proud of his skill and his education than the peasant, who has been used to subordination for centuries. In consequence the resistance of the peasants was more passive than active, but although passive it was wide-spread and very persistent, and it took on many forms. Behind his kowtow and his obsequious smile the Chinese peasant is up to all sorts of tricks to dodge the operation of a law which displeases him. At first the Party had to go carefully, and as a matter of tactics it did not wish to be too severe at first because it was no longer dealing with rich peasants who had already been expropriated, but with poor peasants who had previously been praised and flattered by Mao. Now these new small landowners, who were said to be such enthusiastic supporters of the new régime, hid away their rice and killed their pigs on a mass scale in order to prevent both rice and pigs from falling into the hands of the requisitioning authorities. Those who were discovered were sent to re-education centres where Communist instructors incessantly drummed into them the benefits of co-operation and the evils of backward individualism—the lessons of course being reinforced by threats of what would happen to them next time if . . . But despite these efforts at persuasion, backed up by tens of thousands of deportations in more serious cases, 'backward individualism' continued to flourish amongst these humble beneficiaries of the revolution, and to such an extent that the attempt at co-operative agrarian reform was a failure. In fact, Mao, always a realist, admitted the failure in his report of July 31, 1955, made public on October 17

of the same year. In consequence, he decided to move on straight away to the final phase, that of the collectivisation of agriculture."

"But before you go on to that, what about the other neatly numbered headings of the second phase? Apart from the *three great reforms* there were also the *three great undertakings*—remember?"

"Yes, of course. I haven't forgotten. And I see that you're not likely to forget either. You'd be an awkward heckler at a public meeting I feel. But it's growing late, and you must be getting quite exhausted after taking so many notes. I suggest therefore that we leave the story of the three great undertakings till tomorrow."

"Just as you wish."

I looked out of the door and I saw that, in fact, it was growing dark, and Hongkong was beginning to put on its sparkling rows of diamonds in preparation for the night.

"It's a really lovely sight," I said. "I don't think I've ever seen anything quite so fairylike."

"Which means that you can never have seen Peking or Hangchow at night," he replied, and there was a film of melancholy over his eyes. "If you had, you'd realise better why it took me so long before I could make up my mind to break with the Party. A man has to be pretty desperate to abandon things like that lightly."

THIRD INTERVIEW WITH KU

"WELL," I said to Ku when we were once again seated in the camp's little café the following day, "we've now got as far as the *three great undertakings*."

"Yes. The Five-Year Plan, the Public Health and Hygiene Operation and the colonisation of the frontier marches. These three undertakings were all launched in the years 1952 to 1955."

"In fact, at the same time as the *three reforms*."

"Yes. I don't propose to spend a great deal of time on the Five-Year Plan, because it was an almost servile imitation of what had been done in the Soviet Union."

"In other words, to put it in technical terms: the process of primitive accumulation on the part of State capitalism by means of the ruthless exploitation of the working class and the peasantry."

"Exactly. Everything was just the same: the preference given to heavy industry and the deliberate cutting back of the production of consumer goods; the building of power stations and engineering plants by vast armies of semi-slave labour; the requisitioning of food in the countryside at ridiculously low fixed prices; exhausting labour intensity in the factories and workshops; forced production and the raising of labour norms by Stakhanovites, '*lao mou*' in China; 'socialist competition' as between factory and factory; compulsory State loans to which all have to contribute from their wages; Subotniks, or 'voluntary' unpaid labour; production bonuses, but reserved for labour chiefs; the constant 'overtaking' of the Plan estimates; communiqués in a military style concerning progress made 'on the steel front', and so on; and then—something at least the Russian workers were spared—swarms of 'foreign advisers'."

"Who were these 'foreign advisers'?"

"Soviet experts, of course, who looked down on us condescendingly from the height of their own arrogance and experience. But let it pass. The 'Campaign for Public Health and Hygiene' was a much more

Chinese affair. In 1954, the country suffered a great deal from floods and inundations. You know that floods are one of the endemic curses of China, particularly in the areas irrigated by the Yellow River. When this river overflows its banks, as it often does with great violence, the results are more terrible than those of any similar catastrophes anywhere in the world. The river runs over a bed of soft, yellow-coloured, alluvial soil, hence its name; and for thousands of years it has carried along vast quantities of yellow mud towards its estuary, and this mud is constantly raising the river bed. To keep the river within its banks the riparian inhabitants have always built embankments; and throughout the course of hundreds of years those banks have been built still higher as the river bed rose. The result is that today the surface of this powerful river is several feet higher than the surrounding countryside, through which it flows like a giant aqueduct. But when it does flow over those raised banks, you can imagine what a disaster it is. The Communist Government has laboured enormously to do something about this, and the fact that they have is highly praiseworthy. The only thing is that the work has been carried out as to twenty per cent. by skilled free labour, as to another twenty per cent. by 'voluntary' labour, and as to sixty per cent. by slave labour, which consists of men and women brought from the forced-labour camps, and of vagabonds, beggars, unemployed and homeless rounded up by the local authorities."

"Do you mean that the victims of the disaster are rounded up to repair the crumbled embankment in their sectors?"

"No, I don't mean that exactly; they always did that, and there's nothing blameworthy about it. My point is that, when the work is finished and they want to go back to their own land and rebuild their houses, these homeless people are detained and sent far away as labour power for the hydroelectric plants of the government."

When I heard that I imagined the cries of horror and indignation that would go up from our "progressive" intellectuals in France if some local Prefect took it into his head to round up the unemployed or victims of disasters and send them away to do hard work without their agreement. Ku was looking at me ironically and he seemed to have guessed my thoughts for he went on:

"You must not imagine that Mao had any alternative. You see, it was the victims themselves who forced his hand. They came together spontaneously by their tens of thousands, bearing great pictures of Mao, and clamouring to be sent far away for forced labour, declaring

that they no longer wished to live the fatalist and subjectivist life of the riparian peasant, perpetually expecting to see his land flooded and his home destroyed. Oh, no! they demanded a better fate. And they paraphrased the famous saying of Lenin: 'electricity plus the Soviets equals Socialism', turning it into: 'embankments plus the Communist Party equals Socialism', and demanded that they should be sent instantly a thousand miles and more away from their homes in order to pile up cement. Well now, what could a 'People's Government' do if not satisfy this ardent demand from the people?"

"But didn't you tell me just now that it was the undertaking by the government of these great works which temporarily reconciled you to the régime?"

"Not those operations, because I knew only too well under what conditions they were being carried out. Although such work was undoubtedly in the crying interests of the country, the bureaucracy deprived it of its natural virtue by forcing the pace for publicity purposes and by introducing politics. Many of the embankments built were good and useful, but a lot more were scamped thanks to the prestige and publicity needs of the Party and its Five-Year Plan, and they are likely to give way at the first real test.¹ The problem is certainly a very difficult and complex one. As I have already mentioned, the frequent overflowing of the Yellow River is caused by the steady rise of the river bed as the result of constant alluvial deposits. The only real solution is to build new embankments along the whole length of the river on both sides at some distance from the old banks; these should then be destroyed in order to lower the water level by giving the river a greater breadth, whilst at the same time instituting a permanent baggering system upstream. But Mao hasn't made any attempt at a real solution. No, it was the Public Health and Hygiene Plan which reawakened my enthusiasm. That was directed against rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows, known as the 'four plagues' of China. I was engaged in this work in various parts of the country for about a year. Of course, there were the inevitable propaganda exaggerations and the usual Marxist-Leninist ballyhoo, but despite all this, the campaign was directed towards something essential and valuable.

"In fact, to some extent, even the Party was carried away by the spirit of the thing, so much so that it allowed individual initiative for

¹ At the time of going to press there were reports of new and catastrophic inundations in China in places where embankments had previously been built, which would seem to bear out Ku's prophecy.

the first time. For example, it tolerated the organisation of mosquito-extermination hunts without insisting on political controls. Just think of that! And something even more astonishing happened, something which hadn't happened for a very long time: good humour kept breaking in. For instance, when one of the leading 'Stakhanovites of the rat extermination campaign' was exposed, and it was discovered that in order to obtain his high figures for rats destroyed he was secretly breeding them in a cave, everyone roared with laughter—and the local authorities joined in! Yes, the Campaign for Public Health and Hygiene really was popular, and it achieved a great success to the benefit of all."

Ku got up, walked to the door, looked out, knocked his pipe out on his heel, cleaned it out carefully, filled it again, lit up with an ancient type of lighter, puffed contentedly, picked up a child who had fallen down near by and went off to order tea, which was then brought to us, as usual without sugar, in large transparent cups. I kept silent during this somewhat spun-out performance. It was undoubtedly Ku's way, as an activist by nature and profession, of relaxing and indulging in a little comforting reverie, and for once he looked content. A Communist campaign had been directed towards something useful, and it had been carried through without bloodshed and tears. It was obviously a pleasant memory amongst so many unpleasant ones, and for the moment I dared not ask him to go on and tell me about the last of the *three great undertakings*, because I knew already that it had been one of the most savage and cruel of all; so I was prepared to give him as long as he liked before pulling him out of his dreams. He was now trying to tighten a screw in his old-fashioned watch with his fingernail, but without much success. I remained silent, and it was our interpreter who broke the spell by saying something to him in Chinese. Ku came to with a start, abandoned his quiet fiddling and went on with his story.

"Unfortunately the breath of fresh air that campaign brought into the proceedings didn't last. The so-called colonisation of the interior dragged us back into bureaucratic cruelty again. The principle of the thing was all right. Our population is increasing at an alarming rate, but the dense centres of population remain in one or two central provinces and along the coasts, while all around those crawling conglomerations of humanity there are vast and almost unpopulated areas. The most striking example of this is the province of Sinkiang, which is as big as the whole of Europe not including Russia. It lies

between Tibet, the Pamirs, Soviet Turkestan and Siberia, so to speak in the very heart of Asia. There are not more than a few million inhabitants in this vast area, and half of them are still nomads. The sedentary population consists of Turks, Mongols and a few Chinese. You mustn't imagine the place as a barren desert; on the contrary it is rich in natural resources and the soil is favourable both for agriculture and cattle breeding, which is more or less non-existent in China. But as it stands, about ninety-eight per cent. of the land is completely uncultivated. The climate is not temperate, however; there are no proper roads and there is no irrigation system. It is obviously a very good idea to drain off some of the surplus population from the central and coastal areas into that vast fertile space—on condition, of course, that it is done gradually, according to a carefully prepared plan, and without hardships; for example, by a State-aided plan of voluntary migration.

"But instead of that, the Communist authorities tried to force the thing through with their usual cruel and senseless rush, seizing masses of people in raids and sending them willy-nilly to the colonisation districts. In fact, it was the special police charged with the liquidation of the counter-revolution who were also charged with the carrying out of this plan. Suspects of all sorts and conditions, former wealthy people who were regarded as 'hopeless', new-rich who were regarded as 'too insolent', tramps and vagabonds, unemployed workers, prostitutes, many of the flood victims, convicts, workers who failed to accomplish their labour norms, peasants who failed to pay their taxes, students who had dared to open their mouths and criticise, and members of the Communist Party accused of 'deviationism'; they were all caught up in the widespread net, formed into endless columns and sent off to Sinkiang thousands of miles away from their homes. Up to the moment the number of people forced to emigrate in this way must be about fifteen million."

"And what happened when they arrived there?" I asked.

"They were put into so-called 'free' labour camps of colonists, where the conditions are almost as bad as they are in the forced-labour camps proper, except that these 'colonists' have more freedom of movement than ordinary 'internees'. In any case, the vast empty areas all around are in themselves sufficient to discourage attempts to escape and return to Central China. All they are provided with is a few rudimentary implements and some seed. Everything else they must do for themselves, build their own shelters, clear away the undergrowth,

lay out roads, break up the virgin soil with wooden spades, and so on, though some of them are sent to the mines, where they have to work very hard indeed. Sometimes these colonists have to walk miles to get water and wood for heating and cooking; and as there are large packs of wolves in those lonely parts, they are in danger of being attacked and eaten. There are no schools, no public health services, and many forced marriages—and a good many young girls are raped by the bureaucrats, who know perfectly well that they are too far away from the centre to be punished. Within this area there are also constant forced migrations of groups of people, because the plans of the authorities are constantly changing.

“In addition there is the political hard labour imposed on the unfortunate ‘colonists’, who have to attend three lectures a week, and also persuasion and self-criticism meetings. At the same time the whole atmosphere is poisoned by a vast system of mutual delation. The lot of these ‘colonists’ is unenviable, and the mortality rate is extremely high. The danger of ‘being sent to Sinkiang’ has become an ever-present threat and a nightmare for the population of Central and coastal China—but that doesn’t prevent waves of ‘enthusiastic’ public meetings sweeping over the whole of the country at which resolutions are adopted expressing the ardent desire of the Chinese people to be sent to Sinkiang.

“I once had the job of trying to arouse the enthusiasm of the Shanghai students for the undertaking, and I thought it was a good idea to bring in the name of Pan-Tchao, the legendary hero of the Han epoch, who opened up new territories to Chinese influence two thousand years ago. But this turned out to be wrong, and I was reprimanded and told that the example I must use was the colonisation of the virgin territories of Siberia and so on by Khrushchev. I thought it over, and as a good Communist I came to the conclusion that once again my leaders were right, because Mao’s colonisation with its two railway lines being driven across Sinkiang, its hydroelectric plants and its mines, all constructed by slaves who die like flies, really was more like Khrushchev than Pan-Tchao. And the parallel with the enforced collectivisation of agriculture was even more striking.”

“And that represents the third phase beginning in 1955, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, and it was a particularly brutal phase, prepared by the Party with unusual care, which suggested that something especially important was brewing. We had to attend conferences at which ‘the

historical significance' of the thing was drummed into us, and we were bombarded with 'dialectics' to demonstrate that the previous agrarian reform, which had resulted in the individualisation and atomisation of the land six years previously, really contained 'the germ' of the present collectivisation plan. At the same time our heads were stuffed with figures based on experience in the Soviet Union, and with detailed instructions concerning the manner in which we must proceed. I was well acquainted with the situation in the villages, having often passed through them, and I could see very clearly what was being planned: the rapidly developing new rural petty-bourgeoisie was to have its wings clipped, and full control was now to pass into Communist hands—in other words, the full possession of the soil; there were to be no more private owners. The grandiloquent appeal to the logic of 'the historical process' was only a blind.

"This campaign for the collectivisation of agriculture followed the Soviet model more slavishly than any other of our enterprises: in its rhythm, its methods and its jargon. There was only one new thing about it, and that was unimportant: we did not call our collective farms 'kolkhozes', which is the meaning of the word, as the Russians do theirs, but 'co-operatives'; and this was done to create confusion between them and the purely commercial organs which the Party had founded in the previous phase and which had been a failure. In reality they are 'kolkhozes' and nothing else. The peasants have to surrender their land, their tools and their livestock to the 'co-operative'; in return they are given the title of 'shareholder', and are supposed to have a share of the profits in accordance with their contribution.

"In fact, advantage was taken of the new system to level out the old inequalities which had reappeared once more, and the more prosperous peasants were 'persuaded' to renounce the extra claims they theoretically had as a result of their greater contribution. You already know enough to realise just how this 'persuasion' was achieved. Incidentally, I don't really know why the Party was so keen on this formal legal levelling, because as soon as collectivisation was introduced its own bureaucracy became the complete and absolute master, both of the means of labour and the products of labour, and it could distribute the latter exactly as it pleased. The peasants retained their own individual houses, together with a very small plot of land around them, and they were allowed to keep chickens. But the pig, a domestic animal of over-riding importance in China, where there are practically no cattle, had to be surrendered to the 'co-operative' to be held in

common. All the barns and lofts had to be emptied of their grain, which was then gathered in communal barns and kept under police guard.

"As in the Soviet Union, we also had special mobilisations of the most active militants of the Party to provide Presidents and 'Brigadiers' for the new collective farms. It says something for the military discipline of the Communist Party that these men obeyed the call without hesitation, abandoned their previous lives and habits in the towns, and went off to the countryside to their new jobs on the collective farms, often far away in remote parts of the country, knowing perfectly well that they might be away for years, or perhaps for ever. It is true, of course, that in return they were given that privilege which counts more than luxury for an ardent Communist: power to order his fellow men about. As in the Soviet Union, the peasants were given labour books in which their Communist 'Brigadiers' entered the amount of work done each day. The total 'points' recorded in this way determine the return they receive for their labour.

"As in the Soviet Union, the primary task of the new collectives is to deliver their produce to the State at fixed prices. Only when the fixed amount has been delivered is the surplus divided amongst the peasants. And as in the Soviet Union, these collective farms, which actually have the status of factories, are bombarded with detailed 'directives' covering practically everything, including even the dates at which the livestock must be coupled. Everything the Chinese peasant has been doing regularly for thousands of years without any assistance from outside, is now bureaucratically regulated down to the last detail. The first great harvest all this produces is, of course, a proliferation of red tape, and the one thing which really has grown enormously is the bureaucratic apparatus with its presidents, inspectors, instructors, supervisors, secretaries, managers, experts, advisers, propagandists, and so on. As in the Soviet Union, 'machinery and tractor' stations have been set up, but, of course, on a very much lower technical level. These stations are in the hands of a separate parallel bureaucracy, subject directly to the Central Committee of the Party. In addition to its job of providing and repairing farm tools and machinery, it is also entrusted with the supervision of the other bureaucracy which has been imposed on the new collective farms. Stalin had a hundred times more tractors when he started off than we did, and, in any case, in a country whose chief crop is rice, tractors are not very much use."

"In other words, there is less technical justification for the collectivisation of agriculture in China than there was in the Soviet Union?"

"It's a point I have thought over a good deal, and as far as the production of rice is concerned I fail to see any technical advantage whatever in collectivisation. For the production of cereals in the north the situation is different. It would certainly be of advantage there to use the land in such a fashion that production can be mechanised—even then, of course, only on condition that there is an adequate supply of machinery, a sufficient number of trained instructors to teach the peasants how to use it, a regular supply of spare parts to keep the machinery in working order, mechanics to drive and maintain the tractors and so on, an adequate supply of petrol, tank lorries to carry it to where it is required—pretty well everything, in short, which we just lack. From the strictly technical point of view the collectivisation of agriculture in China is nonsensical. Further, it is inconceivable to me that any system of control and of land redistribution would produce better results than when Chinese peasants till it as individual small proprietors."

"I know that Chinese peasants work hard, but do you mean that their labour is so intense that their production comes up to modern standards?"

"No, I don't mean that. For example, in Japan the production of rice per hectare is double ours. That is due to a combination of better-quality soil, better irrigation, better manuring, higher-quality seed and a better knowledge of rational agricultural procedure. But more modern methods of production could be introduced in China without all this ballyhoo. In Japan the local authorities have produced those favourable results without collectivisation and without the use of any kind of force or compulsion. Believe me, whichever way you look at it, the collectivisation of agriculture in China has only one aim, and that is to force the masses of the Chinese peasantry under the totalitarian control of the Communist bureaucracy by transforming a set of independent undertakings into a regimented ant hill. At the utmost you can add one other objective: to ensure that the necessary supplies can be requisitioned to feed the urban centres, where the population is rapidly growing with industrialisation. That is what Stalin meant when he talked about 'building factories in the towns on an artificially organised famine in the countryside'."

"And what was the attitude of the Chinese peasants to this second

'revolution', which, from what you tell me, seems to be even more counter-revolutionary than the first, since it is re-introducing slavery?"

"There was the same despair on a mass scale as there was in Russia among the Moujiks, and the same resistance, but to a lesser degree owing to a greater tradition of resignation in our country. One of the main arguments with which Mao justified the necessity of swift and ruthless action, as set out in his confidential report to the Party in the autumn of 1955, was that the relatively long time taken in the Soviet Union between the revolution of 1917 and the collectivisation of agriculture in 1930 gave the peasantry too much assurance, whereas if one acted immediately in China the peasants would still be suffering from the shock caused by the terror in the years 1950-2. Mao thus quite literally adopted the precept of Liu Pang, the chief of a peasant band who became a soldier and founded the Han dynasty, and who declared: 'He who chooses the sabre must strike quickly and go on striking to the end.'

"But despite the still recent proofs of the ability of the Communist Party to cut off heads on a mass scale, the peasants were so desperate at the thought that they were going to lose their precious land that they did resist; and there were revolts, sabotage and sporadic outbursts of fury which resulted in the killing of requisitioning agents and the burning of crops. On such a scale, in fact, that, once again as in the Soviet Union, the collectivisation of agriculture was forced on to the peasants in an atmosphere of latent civil war, and the Communist Party had to mobilise over two million of its activists, police and soldiers to enforce it. Conference followed conference at all Party levels, while the press and the wireless churned out 'communiqués'. As many as two films a week were hurriedly produced in all dialects to show the peasants how wonderful their lives were going to become once agricultural collectivisation was in force. Here again Communism displayed a will of iron, though, of course, this was a key operation which was to consolidate its power for a very long time to come and the stakes were therefore big. It was nothing less than 'the Second Revolution', the real and decisive revolution, the revolution of Stalin and not of Lenin. In my estimation, the struggle cost the lives of between five and six million people; some of them executed on the spot, others dragged away to forced-labour camps to perish more slowly."

"But once the collective undertakings were established, did the

peasants then resign themselves to their new lives as piece-workers, or did they continue to resist?"

"The resistance was certainly not at an end with the establishment of the 'co-operatives', and in my opinion the opposition of the peasantry, veiled but still alive, will prove the canker of the Chinese Communist system just as it did in the Soviet Union. As in the Soviet Union, harvest yields have fallen considerably. When I left, it was reckoned in Peking that collectivisation would definitely be 'written in the soil', as they put it, by the end of 1958; that is to say, by the end of the first Five-Year Plan."

"Which means that by then Communism will definitely have been consolidated?"

"Yes, it means that Communism will have reached the stage of a fully fledged State Capitalism, with an all-powerful bureaucracy, an inhuman system of industrialisation, and a proletariat and a peasantry mingled in the same servitude. And the ancient land of China, a mosaic worked right into its farthest corners, as varied as the silks which our women wear, a land where each clump of trees and each hillside creates a different pattern on the face of our soil; that ancient land which each peasant has enriched with his own sweat to make it worthy of his ancestors and to transmit it intact to his sons; that land which cloaks his discreet loves, bears his patient imprint, regulates his silent habits, absorbs his patient labours, and, thanks to a long tradition of industry, responds to his cares; that land of man—if ever any land was man's work and mirror—that land now belongs to kanpous. It no longer belongs to us. It is a mere stamping ground for Communist tyrants."

Once again the expression on Ku's face revealed the distress he felt at the thought of the circumstances which had led him to become one of those tyrants.

"The enforced collectivisation, with its accompaniment of brutality and hypocrisy—because the greatest tragedy both social and personal that any people ever experienced was, of course, presented as its greatest and happiest achievement—re-opened all the old wounds and finally persuaded me to break for good and all with the Party. I began to consider how I could fight against it, though without much hope of ever being able to do it any real harm, and more to rehabilitate myself in my own eyes for the fact that in public I continued to serve it and applaud its actions. At last, after twenty-five years as an activist leader, I managed to secure my transfer to an office. In this way I felt

myself less responsible, because now I was merely registering and collating the action instead of taking an active part in it myself. In the spring of the same year I was sent to X, a small port on the coast of Fukien, to draw up the dossiers for a new big Chen Fen² which was in course of preparation. This was the famous 'One Hundred Flowers' campaign, and at the end of it I was so bitterly disappointed and sickened that I finally broke with the Party and fled."

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I was very anxious to hear the first-hand story of that campaign of "One Hundred Flowers", an extraordinary phenomenon which filled the columns of the world press and was the main subject of conversation in the many capitals of the Far East through which I had passed on my way.

"The campaign was planned far in advance in leading Party circles," Ku began. "From the spring of 1956 on, Mao Tse-tung had begun to accustom the men in the inner circle of the Central Committee to the idea of giving a little more liberty of thought and expression to the people in order to find out what they really thought about those who were leading them. On May 26 he made his famous speech in which he declared: 'The most varied ideas must be given a chance of blossoming like a hundred different flowers in the same field.' That slogan burst like a bombshell in the Communist Party. It seemed to be the antithesis of our cardinal principle: monolithism. It was impossible to believe that it was meant seriously. Imagine the effect on the Catholic Church if the Pope were suddenly to recommend the worship of Jupiter, Osiris, Baal, and Buddha in addition to the Christian God, and to declare that one hundred different gods should blossom in a tolerant Pantheon!

"Now, as for some time before this pronouncement, Mao had withdrawn himself into a semi-divine sort of isolation, something like Stalin, and our Chinese Emperors, did; even the highest officials were not sure of his intentions, and began to whisper anxiously among themselves. Then came the rising in Hungary, and that seemed to settle the matter. Not so, however, and four months later it came to the fore again. On February 27, 1957, in a speech to leading officials of the Party, Mao amplified his observations of the previous year. Our Propaganda Minister, Lou Ting-yi, then edited it and it was published on March 5. And then, on March 12, before a much larger

² Campaign of Rectification.

audience, Mao himself returned to the theme. And finally came the famous editorial of the Peking *People's Daily* on April 13, which lifted the veil for the general public, who now read with stupefaction that there were contradictions in the body of what they had been taught to regard as their 'rational socialist society', contradictions among the peasantry, the proletariat, the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia, and then between all these elements, permuted, so to speak, two by two in every possible combination; and finally—supreme sensation!—between the government and the masses of the people!

"But something even more fantastic was to follow: it was admitted quite frankly that these contradictions had arisen as a result of systematic errors in the actions of the Party. It appeared that the collectivisation of agriculture had been forced through too rapidly; that the counter-revolution had been liquidated too mechanically; that there had been excessive pressure in imposing the new marriage law (that was one of our biggest campaigns and its essential aim, on the pretext of emancipating women, was to get them into industry on a mass scale); that not only the independent artisans but even the industrialists had been expropriated too brutally; that the alphabet had been 'Latinised too formally' (that was another of our campaigns I forgot to mention); and finally, the most astonishing admission of all, that the 'reformatory centres' (mealy-mouthed name for our concentration camps) had been used too indiscriminately—just imagine the enormity of that confession! A few days later, we were bombarded with the usual showers of circulars, directives and other literature, the sort of bombardment which invariably precedes all big actions. Finally the whole thing was summed up in the directives of the Central Committee published on April 27, a date deliberately chosen to precede the May Day celebrations.

"This document declared that after doing its best to educate the people to Socialism, the Party had fallen into the sin of pride and thus committed a number of excesses. In consequence the time had now come for 'the People' to correct the Party by letting it know where it had gone wrong in its direction of the people's affairs. However, the opening shots in this new campaign, although it was revolutionary in itself, were quite in keeping with the usual pattern, since it was the Party—the guilty party in this case!—which was to bestir itself to secure from the wise masses the criticism necessary for its revival in virtue. A term of six months exactly was fixed for this re-birth; as though the enormous octopus of twelve million members to which

the Party had swollen in the meantime, assuming that it was still able to change its character at all, could do the job according to a timetable accurately fixed in advance from above! The total incongruity of the whole thing convinced me that once again a giant farce was being staged.

"However, operations started up immediately at the usual helter-skelter pace, but they came up against a formidable if not exactly unexpected obstacle: no one was prepared to be the first to criticise the Party. Nine years of Communist power ruthlessly wielded had effectively stopped everyone's mouth. The Party newspapers begged and prayed for criticisms, but people remained as silent as the grave. They obviously no more trusted the business than I did. I remember two particularly striking incidents in that frantic flight of the people before the exhortations of the Party to criticise it. A prominent Communist, Hsia Ti, wrote an article in the Communist Youth organ in which he said that the Party was 'like the cat encouraging the mice to tell it in all friendliness just what it was they found objectionable in its behaviour'.³ And in a lecture at the Academy of Sciences, the Communist Professor Yan Tchi-ko declared: 'The intellectuals who are being begged to tell us our faults, are behaving as though they were walking on a thin layer of ice over a lake.'⁴ The fact was that everyone was quite certain that the Party had prepared a trap, and that if anyone dared to come forward in response to the invitation he would fall into it to his cost. Part of my job was to collect and comment on the innumerable signs of this universal distrust and then pass them on. In a few lines they show, better than a learned treatise could, that world of hoax and terror which turns all men into shadows afraid of their own shadows. Listen to a few of them."

There was no question of pulling out a few scraps of creased paper from his pocket, as most of the refugees did when they wanted to document anything; as a good and long-experienced activist, Ku had prepared his documentation conscientiously, and he now took a number of carefully preserved press cuttings from a cardboard folder.

"Listen to what one of the professors at the Peking College of Aeronautics has to say. The Peking *People's Daily* published his letter on May 17, 1957:

³ I subsequently found this reference in a study of the "One Hundred Flowers" published by Saturn: *Tchou Kou Tsing Nien Pao*, Peking, June 16, 1957.

⁴ *New-China Agency*, Peking, May 3, 1957.

'We have now been given permission to speak. But that isn't enough to dissipate our fears. What guarantee have we that what we say won't be carefully noted and used against us later? Perhaps even in ten years' time? What chance have I of saying anything with permanent impunity? All I have to go on is the word of the Secretary of the Party in my Department, and that really isn't much, because it is quite certain that if either of us is brought to trial, even for some crime he has not committed, it will not be him but me. During the last of the Sufan purges there was a crime called "auto-fabricated counter-revolution". No one ever explained clearly to us what that was supposed to mean, but in any case I have no desire to find myself accused of it tomorrow for daring to say what I think of the Party today.'

"And here's another, published by the *Wen Hui Pao* in Shanghai on April 28, 1957:

'Since the Liberation we have learnt to hold our tongues . . . [By the way, note how natural it is, for people in Communist China that what is officially called liberation should entail what is usually its opposite, namely a still tongue.] . . . because the kanpous note our words even when they are spoken casually and in the most intimate conversations. And when the next campaign comes along, they produce our words, and then they have us as tightly as you hold a pig by its tail. . . . Is it really so astonishing that we have learnt to keep our mouths shut?'

"In order to get the critical ball rolling the Party had to stage knock-about farces. It organised meetings at which it put up its own stooges to utter previously arranged criticisms in the hope of tricking others into coming forward and criticising too. But the Communists had resorted to that kind of decoy system so often before that no one was deceived. From urging and almost begging the kanpous now began to threaten, and to point out that to keep silent when the Party required frankness was also a deviation. But now Big Brother began to grow impatient with his bumbling kanpous: 'Shall I have to cut off those heads of yours, before I can find out what the *masses* are thinking?' This scared them, and they redoubled the numbers of circulars and directives they sent out instructing their subordinates how to make the tongue-tied citizens open up; and the subordinates began to threaten their subordinates and charge them with 'lack of

zeal in the collection of complaints', and 'sabotage of the spontaneous criticism of the masses'. Urged on in this way, the smaller official fry now began to threaten the silent citizens in real earnest."

"You're pulling my leg! It sounds like something out of a lunatic asylum."

"Nevertheless it's true; you've only got to read the Chinese Communist press of the period, and you'll find it all there, word for word, and over and over again."

"Well, what happened in the end then?"

"After a herculean effort to lift the leaden cover which the Party itself had screwed down on the country, the first timid expressions of public opinion began to make themselves heard. Two factors contributed to the loosening up. The first was the increasing threat which hung over those who insisted on remaining silent; after a while it became just as risky (and more immediately so) to remain silent as to come out with discontents and criticism (the danger there was a matter for the future). The second, and the decisive factor, was that the first criticisms were published without being censored, and, for the moment at least, nothing happened to their authors. The miracle was now plain for all to see."

"So that even in this extraordinary undertaking, which consisted of compelling the people to thumb noses at the Party, the will of the Party prevailed in the end?"

"Precisely! That is exactly what did happen in the end. Observing that the skies did not fall at the first hesitant words of criticism, people were encouraged, and the thin trickle became a stream, and then a mighty river. From May 20 to June 10—just look up the Party press for that period—a vast wave of hostility arose throughout the country. People showed each other the latest criticisms directed against the Party and published in the newspapers; they embraced each other with joy, and took heart once more. And all the time the tone of the criticism grew sharper and sharper."

"Was that movement really unanimous?"

"Undoubtedly it went very far, but nevertheless it stirred only a minority of imprudent people into action. The great mass of the people still preferred to remain silent,⁵ but the number of people who

⁵ *La Chine de la Douceur* confirms this: "Many Chinese," says Bodard, "preferred prudence, an age-old quality of China. Every morning in Shanghai the wife of an 'ex-capitalist' led him to the ancestral tablets, hidden but lovingly preserved, and kept him there until he swore again to say nothing whatever and to keep everything to himself."

did let themselves be carried away was sufficiently great for their criticisms and complaints to fill pages and pages of all the Chinese newspapers for weeks."

"What did they actually say about the Party?"

"Well, if you want to know that, all you need do is to look up the Communist press for the period and you'll find a vast amount of it. As the thing is still very recent, and as I experienced it all intensively and at very close hand, I can tell you a good deal from memory. The extraordinary and unimaginable feature of the avalanche was the gravity and the audacity of the criticisms which hailed on the Party from all sides and were nevertheless published in its press. Every morning when you read the newspapers you had to pinch yourself to make quite sure you weren't dreaming. Rectors of this, that and the other institution declared openly that the Communist Party had become an instrument for the oppression of the people. Agronomists, writing in the name of the people in their districts, demanded the immediate dissolution of the collective farms. Students wrote in to say that they had enjoyed far greater liberty under Chiang Kai-shek than they did under the Communist Party. Former capitalists declared that their 'compensation' was mere trickery. Workers insisted that they had been less exploited by their former capitalist employers than they were now by the factory directors appointed by the Communist Party. Even Communist secretaries openly denounced the subjugation of China by the all-powerful emissaries of Moscow. Authors insisted that it would not be possible to hold down six hundred million Chinese for ever under the scourge of ten million Cossacks—which was a popular name for Communists. And then the denunciations reached their very peak in an attack on the Communist god-head himself, Mao Tse-tung, who was accused of trickery and cruelty. After that, words were rapidly followed by actions. The expropriated merchants organised a Black Market. The peasants came together in new secret societies in order to sabotage the rice requisitions. The opposition crystallised with the aim of bringing about a new régime. The students issued leaflets calling on the people to revolt against their Communist masters. The thing was getting out of hand and threatening to culminate in a vast explosion.

"But when Mao decided that the matter had gone far enough, he put a sudden stop to it with all the energy and cynicism of the good Bolshevik. An editorial now appeared in the *People's Daily* announcing that 'criticism had gone too far'. And with this the gates of heaven

were closed once more, and from June 15 a leaden silence descended on the whole of China once again. The gleam of hope which had seemed so encouraging was now extinguished, and no more criticism was heard. Once more those pessimists who had put the worst possible construction on the action of the Party were confirmed in their views. On June 21, speaking at a plenary session of the National Assembly, Chou En-lai gave the leaden cover the last brutal tap to fix it into place again. I can remember the words he used only too clearly; they must have sounded like the death knell for many of those who had allowed themselves to be deceived: *'Liberty will never be granted to those who seek to destroy the régime. We do not propose to tolerate criticism when it is inspired by hostile ideologies.'*

"And as a sort of post-mortem came the notorious editorials of the *People's Daily* on June 22 and July 1, 1957, which admitted frankly that the whole affair was nothing but a trap baited by the Party for its enemies to fall into and unmask themselves.⁶ After thinking they were breathing the air of liberty once again the Chinese people found themselves tighter than ever in the grip of the secret police."

"So you believe that the whole campaign was deliberately organised in the first place as a gigantic trap for the opponents of the Communist régime? As a matter of fact there was a good deal of discussion on the point abroad, and the experts were inclined to take a different view from yours. According to them, Mao, desiring to line up with Khrushchev and his famous thaw, sincerely desired to liberalise his régime and open a sluice gate or two; but when he saw that instead of the manageable trickle he had expected there was a tossing flood of hatred, and that the people did not wish to *reform* his system but *get rid of it* altogether, he took fright and incontinently stuffed up all the vent holes again. Then, in order that it should not be said that he had been caught napping, since a Communist leader must be infallible, he pretended that the whole thing was a previously arranged trap to catch his enemies.

* I have since looked up the numbers of the Peking *People's Daily* in question. The editorial of June 22 declares: "Under cover of the rectification campaign the right-wing elements . . . launched a furious attack on the socialist régime led by the Party. At first the Party decided not to counter-attack in order that the masses should have an opportunity of seeing the real features of these people and drawing their own conclusions. . . . In these circumstances the right-wing elements came right out of their holes . . . and fell into the trap which the Party had previously prepared for them."

The editorial of July 1 declares: "You let weeds grow at first in order the better to uproot them."

In other words, he preferred to be thought infamous rather than foolish."

"Yes, I've heard that theory, but for various reasons I don't think it holds water. First of all, if in the beginning Mao had actually had some such idea of experimenting in letting off steam, it strikes me as highly improbable that he would have continued with it once the Budapest revolt had amply demonstrated the danger of the slightest concession to liberty. You must not forget that for Mao, as for many Communist leaders, the Hungarian uprising was the deplorable result of an effort to introduce a little controlled liberalism; and a clear warning that any such experiment was dangerous and would inevitably burst out of the limits fixed for it. And further, if there had been a sincere intention to bring about a *détente*, it would be difficult to understand why it took the incongruous form of urging people to attack the leaders currently in charge. On the contrary, that form fits into the picture perfectly if the intention were from the first to bring dangerous elements into the open.

"For example, after the Twentieth Party Congress, the Soviet Communist leaders unscrewed the lid a little, but they did not do it in this extraordinary form. They proceeded with every possible precaution, authorising only very moderate criticisms within carefully defined limits—and the only targets allowed for the pot-shots were chiefly dead and gone Communist leaders, not those actually in charge at the moment. And the essential aim of the thaw as practised by Khrushchev was to allow people to breathe a little more easily in their daily lives—not to loosen their tongues about their masters. That is to say, the régime of repression was to be lightened a little, the Iron Curtain raised a little; the Communists themselves were to be given a little more security, and the ordinary citizen a little more liberty—but only in their ordinary businesses, not in order to allow them to say things about Khrushchev. If a despotism is really anxious to become more flexible, then the last thing it will give full rein to is obviously the public opinion about the despot. But that is precisely what Mao did—without doing anything else. Absolutely nothing was done to loosen the bonds which bound the people; they were merely invited to declaim against the government. Surely it is incongruous to introduce a 'thaw' which gives the citizen the least possible practical satisfaction—and the government the hardest possible slap in the face?

"And there are other flaws in this theory of Mao's disappointed good faith. If the aim of the operation really was to bring about a

sincere liberalisation of the régime, and then Mao was taken by surprise because of the volume and the intensity of the criticisms it provoked, why did he immediately follow up the campaign with a wave of implacable repression against those who had dared to criticise him? If he had sincerely desired to loosen the gag a little, and then found that he had got more than he bargained for, surely he would just have adjusted the gag again, and not cast into prison all those who dared to speak, and thereby had met his supposed desire. And, in particular, once the operation was over, was there really any cogent reason for him to invent the story of a carefully prepared trap—if there were, in fact, no trap?”

“But supposing the whole thing had been a trap,” I objected. “One also cannot see any reason why Mao should admit it so frankly, and thus brand his own infamy in the eyes of the world. He could have claimed credit for his generosity in trying to give the Chinese people the right to criticise, and then have charged the wicked counter-revolution with abusing his generosity, and making it necessary for him to return regretfully to his previous system. Better still: he need not have said anything at all. His power in China is sufficiently great to allow him to start campaigns and end them at will without troubling to explain anything to anybody.”

“Excuse me, but you forget one important point. Such a provocation was bound to have one weakness: namely that it could not succeed unless it allowed the expression of *real* criticism. But then the danger arose that the echo of this real criticism would live on in the minds of those who were allowed to read it, long after the critic himself had been disposed of. This is why it is important, once such criticisms have served their purpose, to destroy them and put them out of mind; and the best way to do this would be to besmirch the whole thing with this story of a trap: if the critics are presented as poor boobies who have let themselves be caught, then whatever they may have said will be discredited.”

“Perhaps that is true, and I haven’t analysed the affair carefully enough. However, Mao would be able to obtain that effect of discrediting the criticism only among his own Communists; but abroad the voices that were heard again in your country retained all their revealing force.”

“Exactly. That is why the complaints were of such inestimable value, and that is why I have prepared you a list of them which you can study at leisure. But to return to the question of the Party’s motives

in launching the campaign, remember this: if there had been a sincere desire for liberalisation, couldn't the Party have published what it regarded as moderate and constructive criticisms, and handed over the attacks of the 'counter-revolutionaries' to the police for attention? If there's one thing in which the Party is the undisputed master in China, it is in its control over the printed word. Not a single word more or less than the Party desires is ever published in China. Revolts against the Party can certainly still take place but what certainly cannot happen is any written things appearing in the press against the Party's will. The idea of 'criticism going too far', which was accepted by your experts as the real explanation, just doesn't fit into a Communist system at all, and to think it possibly could is to betray an occidental mentality accustomed to real freedom of expression.

"And there's another improbable point in the theory put forward by your experts, and that is the suggestion that the Chinese Communist leaders could be 'surprised' by the volume and the sharpness of the criticisms they unleashed; that they could possibly be 'surprised' to discover how thoroughly well hated they were. That suggestion won't stand up to examination; the Communist leaders know, and knew, perfectly well what the Chinese people really think of them—hence their whole régime of repression, their secret police, their strict censorship, their Iron Curtain, their gerrymandered 'elections', and so on. All these things would be incomprehensible except on the assumption that the leaders are perfectly well aware of the real opinions of the Chinese people, and of the hatred which fills them."

"And that's why you believe the whole thing was a trick from the beginning?"

"Yes, it is. And also because—this is another point regularly missed by democratically bred commentators—the technique of the cleverly baited and adroitly sprung trap is one of the essential requisites of any totalitarian régime. It corresponds to an important need, which those who are part of the machinery keenly appreciate, but which those who live in democratic societies never think of—namely, the necessity of discovering where the main centres of discontent lie. In the first phase which immediately follows the seizure of power there is no such problem. The society which has been overthrown was a free society, and those who lived in it were used to expressing their views openly; therefore, in that period, the Communist Party was never in any doubt as to the identity of its enemies, and it knew just where to strike. But after eight years of Communist dictatorship in China,

there was the silence of the grave. Outwardly, people pretended to approve; inwardly, they detested Communism and all its works. Above all, there is no doubt that the enforced collectivisation greatly increased the general hostility towards the Communist régime. But where exactly were the nerve centres of that hostility? The general hostility was so great that it became urgently necessary to mow down this new batch of bitter enemies. But who were they exactly? Only a large-scale provocation could make them come out of the shadows and declare themselves.

"In any case, the Communist Party has a good deal of experience in such tricks. For example, during the civil war it would often send a special group of activists into a district which had just been conquered with instructions to make excessive exactions in order that the latent hostility should be brought to a head and its leaders revealed. When this trick had succeeded, the normal civil administrators of the Party would arrive and make a great show of 'correcting' the excesses of their predecessors, whilst at the same time taking careful note of those who had expressed their feelings openly. This was essentially the same technique as the trap prepared with the famous campaign of the 'One Hundred Flowers'.

"However, although my inquiries lead me to conclude that this campaign was a deliberate trick from the start, this does not mean that all doubt has been disposed of in the matter, because I have only inferences to go on. Here you see how low the Party has fallen: in a so-called popular régime the people can never know the motives of its rulers, any more than they knew the motives of the most secret of our Emperors two thousand years ago."

Ku had touched a chord which has always particularly moved me, though I don't know why, and which, for even more obscure reasons, has met with scant attention in anti-Communist criticism: namely, the impenetrability of Communist States. To me that is one of the most patent signs of degeneracy. After all, is it not a specific characteristic of an oppressive power that its motives should be hidden from the public view? Whereas, on the other hand, a power which really abolishes the ancient subjection of the small to the great is precisely recognisable by the transparency of its motives; that is to say, it allows the small to know about the manoeuvres of the great. I passed over this idea to take up the thread of my remarks with Ku:

"I appreciate the keenness of your analysis, and the modesty with which you submit it. You say you have been compelled to rely upon

inferences to support your views, but they are certainly very cogent. My colleagues in the West have no more to go on, and yet that does not prevent some of them from being very dogmatic where Khrushchev and Mao are concerned. But to come back to you: we seem to be approaching the end of your career as a Communist now?"

"Yes, the affair of the 'One Hundred Flowers' was the *coup de grâce* as far as I was concerned, but it was triggered off by the incident I propose to describe now. One day I was called to the Control Committee, that is to say, the G.P.U. of China. I may add that my work brought me into contact with this department quite often, and I was therefore not particularly disturbed by the summons. As I was well known there I was allowed to go straight into the room of the official who had summoned me, although he had left it for a moment or two. It so happened that I was a few minutes ahead of my appointment and he had not expected me so early. There were various papers on his desk, and as I went up to it my attention was attracted by one marked 'confidential'. I glanced at it quite casually, but what I saw made my blood freeze. It was a report on the discovery and arrest of a counter-revolutionary, a woman, who had been recorded as executed seven years previously in the province of Hupei. It went on to say that after a thorough interrogation the woman had admitted that she had been aided to escape by one of our agents. Following up this admission, a list had been drawn up of the agents engaged at the time in carrying out the operation in which this woman should have been executed and on it was 'Comrade Ku, at present attached to . . . in your town'. The document went on to instruct the local G.P.U. to carry out the necessary inquiries about this comrade, and added that the necessary extracts from the dossier of the comrade in question were attached."

I now remembered what Ku had said earlier on about the incident, and that it had ultimately resulted in bringing his career as a Communist to an end.

"For a moment things went black before my eyes," Ku went on, "but I pulled myself together, and my Bolshevik training stood me in good stead. I could see that there was not the slightest hope of emerging unscathed from the strict interrogation I should now be subjected to, and I decided on the spot that the time had come for me to flee. It was then that a number of precautions I had taken at the date of my inner rupture with the Party proved of vital importance. I left the building at once, and without going back to my office, or even going home, I

went straight to the house of my only friend. He was the brother of that Fong who had been my comrade in arms on the 'Long March', and who, as I have already told you, had been executed during the purge in Yen-an in 1942. The authorities had informed his brother that Fong had lost his life in an accident, but I had told him the truth, and he had been grateful to me. He had already regarded the Communists with a good deal of suspicion; now he hated them for having murdered his brother. However, with typically Chinese self-control, he had kept his feelings to himself. We became good friends, and I was able to help him in a number of ways, particularly by giving him valuable advice. He owned a fishing boat with a crew of six men. On my advice he did not wait for the 'Plan of Joint-Management', but voluntarily offered his boat to the Fisheries Co-operative, and this gave him the reputation of being 'an enlightened small owner'. Under cover of this favourable reputation Fong's brother and I had made preparations to flee the country at a moment's notice.

"I will spare you the details. Suffice it to say that when I informed him of the situation which had suddenly arisen, he and his wife and son were ready to leave within a quarter of an hour. That may sound exaggerated, but there was very little he had to put in order, and the sum total of his possessions was a certain amount of bed linen, one or two documents, and eighty-six old American dollars which he had kept carefully hidden. Everything he had was made up into two bundles. Incidentally, fishermen are forbidden to go on board their boats with any baggage—for obvious reasons. But my friend had concealed blankets, salted food and rice on board in order to be prepared for any eventuality. In the same way, for the past two years he had kept his boat on the list of those permitted to carry out night fishing. When darkness fell, therefore, my friend and his son went aboard their boat, and in consequence this did not arouse the suspicion of the guards, who are always on the look-out to prevent boats being used to take fugitives out of the country. As for his wife and me, we slipped aboard the boat under cover of darkness as it passed the end of the mole, being assisted in this by the shadow of another boat. We then put out to sea and safety. From the moment I had seen that fatal document on the desk of the G.P.U. official to the moment we disappeared into the darkness, not more than a couple of hours had passed."

"At least your Bolshevik training in ruthlessness and determination was not lost on you when the time came to turn it against Mao.

What was your state of mind now that the sudden decision to flee had been taken?"

"Throughout the night we were too excited at what we were doing to have much time to think. We had to make all possible haste and put as many miles as possible between us and Communist territory in the shortest possible space of time. Our vessel had a motor and three sails. Now I don't know anything at all about navigation myself, but I had the impression that my friend and his son were performing miracles. In theory we needed three days to get to Hongkong, and when dawn broke we cautiously put in nearer to the shore to see what progress we had made, and my friend informed me with satisfaction that we had done more than a third of the distance. We then turned out to sea again until we were out of sight of the shore and continued on our way.

"It was when we came in sight of land again that I suddenly realized the full meaning of what I was doing, and the complete change which had now come over my destiny. What I saw was like an old print in the Song style: the limitless stretch of water out to sea, dotted with a few sails, the undulating coastline in the mist, clumps of trees here and there, and small houses with their curved roofs set against a background of rocks. It was the same China which had existed for thousands of years. And at the sight I felt a catch at my heart. In a flash I saw its entire history, and I saw mine, and I wept. I recalled that fatal day, twenty-five years previously, when I had first joined the Communists; and suddenly a memory was revived which I had completely forgotten in the meantime, and made my heart sink.

"I recalled that, at the moment of joining the Party, I was troubled by the memory of my father who had died in the fire which had devastated our village as a consequence of the Communist attack on it. He had been a Chinese tradesman of the old school, a shoemaker, honest, industrious and helpful. And when I signed my application for membership of the Communist Party, I had the impression that his eyes were looking at me reproachfully from beyond the grave. I can't really explain why this should have been so, because he knew nothing whatever about politics; but nevertheless I had the impression that in joining the Communist Party I had been disloyal to his memory. However, the impression was quickly dissipated. I signed, and soon forgot my strange feeling. I forgot it for twenty-five years. And then, on that small fishing boat which was bearing me away from my country, leaving behind the ruin of all my hopes and the distress

of my fellow citizens, I understood at last: through my father's eyes it was *China* which had looked at me silently. China had chosen the intercession of one of its most humble but faithful servants, my father the shoemaker, and that sign he sent from beyond the grave was to warn me that in joining the Communist Party I was betraying my country. Unfortunately I did not understand that message. And now China disappeared from view in the distance, dead to me and dead because of me. If I had only paid heed to that moment of misgiving! There was more truth in it than all in my pitiful reasoning."

Ku was silent for a while, but then, with the understanding and discretion which had already astonished me more than once in this former activist of the Chinese Communist Party, he put aside his own emotions and took up his story again, though now he was obviously anxious to have done with it.

"At dawn after the third night at sea, we came in sight of the bay of Hongkong and we landed in a lonely cove on Victoria Island. Delightedly we embraced each other. We had escaped from hell into the land of the living. And that is the end of my story."

I shook his hand silently. I had followed the story of his escape with all the tense excitement of a youngster watching a thrilling film, and I was as delighted at the happy ending as though I had taken part in it myself; as though, in saving himself, Ku had saved me too.

THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES

KU had left China before a new chapter opened which once again upset the Chinese scene: the advent of the so-called "People's Communes", and before a sensational political happening took place, namely the retirement of Mao Tse-tung from the Presidency of the People's Republic—an event which looks more sensational than it actually is, since Mao remained the leader of the Chinese Communist Party. I must now supplement Ku's description of events by adding two more recent phases, which I don't propose to insert into his account but which it is nevertheless useful to distinguish.

THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD

In November 1957 the Chinese Communists launched the operation called the "great leap forward". The style, the magnitude and the intensity of this operation were once again those of the big campaign, the elemental tidal race. All the usual methods were brought into use: mass-meetings, demonstrations, processions, military-style communiqués, films, good examples, infamous examples, socialist competitions, denunciations and mass mobilisations.

What was it all about this time? Nothing less than the abandonment of all previous plans in order to accelerate fivefold the growth of production, which, in any case, had already been fixed at the very high target of twenty per cent. per annum. In other words, the idea was to condense an evolution which would normally take a whole historical era into one single, prodigious "leap forward".

Why the sudden haste? Of what nature was the pressure which forced the régime to take such a step? Or had its rulers lost their heads in their enthusiasm? Later on I will return to this question of the motives which impelled China's ruler to launch the campaign, but for the moment I will confine myself to describing it.

Three closely related ideas were behind the action: the first was to extract the last drop of energy from the labour power of the Chinese

people. The second was to go over to production "by great masses". And the third was "to send the blast furnaces into the villages".

It is easy enough to find reserves of man-power still unemployed if you aren't particular where you look for them. The first reservoir, and the biggest, is to be found in China, as in all countries, in the lack of occupation of peasants during the winter months. The second is the time spent by mothers and wives in their household duties. And the third is the time spent by all in sleeping. Labour is therefore recruited in the countryside during the winter months. In order to release the labour power of the women from their household duties, you open up mass-feeding establishments, and workshops to produce garments on a mass scale, which represent the final stages of the People's Communes. And then, in the words of Po I Po, the President of the National Economic Commission, a man who has played a leading role in the "great leap forward", you "let Socialism work at night too", in other words you introduce night work everywhere.

To what end was this immense tapping of the labour power of the vast masses of the Chinese peasantry first used?

In the first place it was used to perform certain tasks relating to the infrastructure: the embankment of rivers, irrigation work, the reclaiming of marshland, re-forestation, the building of roads and railways and the digging of canals, and so on. These vast undertakings were carried out on gigantic sites employing up to fifty thousand men; and enormous masses of earth, rocks and water were shifted without employing any technique other than that of "great masses of workmen". But it was not only for such navvying that scores of millions of peasants were brought together in the new mobilisation. Industry shared in the new labour force, thanks to the launching of another "revolution" which distributed elements of rural industrial production all over the country, making use of this same "great mass" of unskilled workmen.

In this way Mao and his men set up tens of thousands of small blast-furnaces in the woods and forests everywhere, brick kilns, coking-ovens and artisanal refineries for production on a mass scale with "small tools", and using leather, cotton, wood and clay as raw materials. New mines were also dug with the same "small tools" wherever there was the slightest vestige of metal or ore: copper, lead, zinc, iron, coal, mica. The authorities organised "a great wave of patriotic enthusiasm" for the discovery that "the ancient science of China" could produce a great number of things with simple but effective means. This was, of course, quite true, but no truer than that "the ancient science" of all

countries can do the same. In more developed countries it is no longer done, for the very good and simple reason that the methods of modern science are very much more efficient.

In one point at least the new experiment goes back even beyond the appearance of human kind on earth. It takes its inspiration from the practices of certain necrophagous animals. Determined to extract the last ounce, not only from the lymph of their subjects, but also from the alluvium of their soil, the Chinese Communists have discovered a source of riches which no human group in the world has ever thought of exploiting before, namely the dead who lie under the earth. Regardless of the particularly horrifying sacrilege their action represents in a country whose people are devoted to the cult of ancestor worship, the Chinese Communist Government has ordered that the tombs, reverently tended by Chinese peasants behind their houses, shall be rased and the dead collectivised by being transferred to public cemeteries.¹ In this connection one or two over-zealous officials, thinking only of production, had the tombs in their districts opened up as ordered, but then, instead of sending the corpses to a public cemetery, they sent the wood of the coffins to the workshops for further use, and the bones were ground down to produce manure.

One might perhaps think that an exploitation which reduced workmen to the living dead had reached the limits of the imaginable, but that would be to reckon without one's Chinese Communist hosts. There still remained the possibility of exploiting the long-since dead.

THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES OR "JEN-MIN KUNG-SHI"

The new torrents of human labour ended in the People's Communes as certainly as rivers end in the sea. Although the "great masses" had to remain in their own districts, the sites necessary for concentrating the labour of tens of thousands of arms and hands had nevertheless to be in certain spots, and this raised urgent problems of transport. At the same time the mad hunt to organise every minute of the day which could be used in the interests of the State necessarily reduced the number of minutes available for normal family life. And finally it proved impossible to adjust wages and time-tables on the collective farms with those of the "great leap forward", as they concerned different tasks.

The appropriate solution was ordered and carried out by Mao in the spring of 1958. It was then legalised by the historic decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of August 29 of the same

¹ Cf. *People's Daily*, Peking, August 6, 1958.

year: the dissolution of the collective farms and their re-groupment in much larger communities, embracing between 40,000 and 80,000 people and capable of performing all the necessary tasks within their own framework: agriculture, industry and navvying. At the same time, in order to facilitate the mobilisation of labour, life within these communities was organised collectively down to the smallest detail.

This reform, perhaps the most brutal that any power ever imposed on its people, was rushed ahead with the same frenzy which marked the "great leap forward". The usual deluge of propaganda, manufactured enthusiasm and delirious activism was carried to unimaginable lengths. But this time the authorities did not take the trouble to organise the usual comedies in which the masses implored the government to put them all into People's Communes. Made wise by the mass exodus of the peasants at the time of the agricultural collectivisation, the government took the greatest possible care to prevent any large-scale movements of the population.

On December 18, 1957, a decree was issued forbidding all peasants and agricultural labourers to go to the towns unless they could produce a letter engaging them for employment there, or a letter of admission to a school or hospital. At the same time a motorised corps of police and inspectors patrolled all roads, and guarded all bridges, railway stations and ferries in order to capture fugitives. Strict instructions were also issued to all transport workers on the trains, buses, ferries and ships, and the workers at all feeding and dormitory centres to stop and arrest all fugitives. At the same time the urban authorities were instructed to carry out large-scale raids to comb their districts for peasants who might have succeeded, despite all these precautions, in making their way into the towns, and to arrest them and send them back to the place they had come from. As a result, over a million such fugitives were discovered and sent back to the countryside by force.

Only after this vast quartering of the country had taken place in order to imprison everyone in his native district, plain, valley or hills, did the authorities proceed with the plan to put them all in "Communes". But then it was carried out *manu militari*: the collective farms were dissolved on the spot, often within a day, by officials armed with plenary powers. The "co-operative" titles of the peasants were just annulled, and their holders fobbed off with the yarn that they were being recorded in the "Great Book" which would be kept centrally under the guard of the Party. The mass of those capable of physical labour was now reorganised into sections, groups, brigades, companies

and regiments. Tools, material, livestock, furniture, even individual linen, etc., were requisitioned. This off-hand disposal of the belongings of the peasants was perhaps the most cogent exposure of the official lie according to which the peasants were their own masters in the collective farms.

By the end of that extraordinary year, 1958, everything was completed, at least as far as the institutionalisation was concerned. The following figures, which refer both to the "great leap forward" and to the People's Communes, give a shattering idea of the social earthquake which rent China in that period: ninety-nine per cent. of the collective farms had been turned into People's Communes. What about the remaining one per cent.? What does it matter? I am merely quoting the official figures published in the theoretical organ of the Chinese Communist Party, *The Red Flag*, which from September 1958 on provided a good deal of information on the new experiment. Half of these so-called People's Communes were turned straight away into strictly disciplined military-style Communes, whilst the remainder were urged to eliminate hastily all those remnants of the old mode of life where they still persisted. Approximately 400,000 rural blast-furnaces, and almost as many primitive mines and manufactories for "great-mass" labour were set up, also several million common refectories, and make-shift barracks, often mere shacks. On the assumption that the products of these new industrial units which have been set up all over China are more or less up to standard, then their total production will be almost as great as that of the urban factories in the same sectors, which means that the total volume of national production in these sections will almost have doubled, or, in other words, an increase of about thirty per cent. in the total national product.

In fact, the products turned out by these rudimentary installations in the countryside by "ancient Chinese science" are very far below the standards set up by modern industrial techniques. However, they are good enough for simple uses: primitive kitchen utensils, beams for the construction of communal buildings, spades, picks and above all ploughshares, whose shortage was catastrophic in 1957. The sector in which this "great-mass" labour has produced the best results is what I have called navvying (the building of embankments, irrigation systems, and so on), and from the first year it is said to have resulted in an increase of thirty to forty per cent. in agricultural produce.

These figures would represent an achievement without precedent in human history. But can they be accepted at their face value? We know that Communist governments are past masters at the art of

falsifying statistics. Furthermore the communiqués issued from Peking bristle with innumerable contradictions and blatant fantasies. However, even if we cautiously divide by, say, three, the gross supplementary product extracted from the "great-mass" labour of the Chinese people in 1958 as compared with 1957 still remains very considerable in weight and volume. But now let us see at what a cost in sweat and suffering such results were obtained.

THE NEW FACE OF CHINA

Let us close our eyes and remove ourselves in imagination to the Chinese countryside, opening our eyes there to observe the people engaged in this "great-mass" labour and living through their days as organised for them by the Communist Party. The first thing we shall see is innumerable small huts and hovels standing deserted, many of them already in course of demolition. These were once the humble homes of the former individual peasant families, the dwelling places of the sons of Han. Let us go into one of them. It is empty and there is no sign of life. Its former inhabitants have been removed to a collective dormitory. The rooms are unfurnished now; not a stick is to be seen. All the bits and pieces have been taken away to the Commune barracks. The kitchen is cold, damp and deserted, and the place sounds dull and hollow like an ice grotto. The dishes have gone too, and the saucepans, and the old poker. Even the door-handles have been removed. And all around is complete silence; there are no chickens scratching in the yard, no pigs snorting in the sty. They have all been carried off to the barracks for chickens and the barracks for pigs, beside the barracks for human beings. The loft is bare, and the bundles of firewood that were once there have also been carried off—requisitioned by the community. In one corner there is a small empty shelf askew on its bracket. Was that the little altar once devoted to the spirits of the ancestors? And, of course, there is no sound of children anywhere. They have been taken away to the barracks for children, called *crèches*; there they will stay until they are eight years old, when they will emerge, in ordered groups of course, to spend half their time at their lessons and the other half at work, in accordance with the latest *avant-garde* principles of child upbringing.

Having assured ourselves that there is nothing more to be seen here, let us follow the absent human beings. It is dawn: a bugle sounds in the barracks, and the men and women in their separate dormitories get up. What arrangements there are for affording any privacy to husbands

and wives when they want to be together I just don't know.² Then there is a quarter of an hour for breakfast. The bugle sounds again. This is for the fall-in. It sounds a third time and the columns move off on their way to work: on foot, in carts, and sometimes even in lorries—with banners at their head. On the way they meet similar columns returning from night work. They set off in this way according to the seasons of the year, and according to the plan drawn up for them by officials sitting in comfortable rooms far away, making their way to the primitive blast-furnaces, mines, and rural workshops, or just into the fields.

Here is how the Peking *China Youth News* of September 27, 1958, describes the scene in the model Commune "Sputnik" at Shangcheng in the province of Honan:

"At dawn the bugles sound and whistles blow to gather the population of the commune 'Sputnik'. A quarter of an hour later the peasants are drawn up in line. At the orders of their brigade and company commanders they now move off in military step to the fields, carrying their banners. Here you no longer see the small groups of peasants, two or three at a time, smoking and making their way leisurely to the fields. Instead you hear the measured tramp of many feet and the sound of marching songs. The age-old habit of living haphazardly has now disappeared for ever with the Chinese peasants. What an enormous change! In order to adapt itself better to modern life and collective labour the commune has launched a movement for the shifting and reunification of the villages. The peasants now move together in groups to spots nearer to their place of work. What an astonishing change! From the days of antiquity the peasants have regarded the home as their most precious possession, handed down to them by their ancestors. But now that the little patches of land, the small houses and the livestock have become the property of the commune, and now that the bonds which attached the peasants to their villages have been severed so that there is nothing left of their former home which they could still desire, they feel at peace. Now they say: 'The place where we live doesn't matter to us; we are at home anywhere.'"

² My picture of life in a Chinese People's Commune is based on the available facts, and only on those I know for certain. Where I have been unable to confirm any detail fully I have omitted it; which explains the gaps relating to the way these barracks are furnished, the type of food provided in the canteens, the time made available for the joint life of married people, and so on.

In reality the home of the unfortunate Chinese peasant is not "anywhere", it is "nowhere". Very often it is in the open air, working amongst the rubble, where we will take a look at him now.

The working site. Anything from 3,000 to 15,000 Chinese peasants work together on these sites, which often extend over miles. Piles of earth and rubble, and seas of mud are everywhere. It is like that on all building sites of course. But things are different here. The peasants are working as "great-mass" labour, and according to "ancient Chinese science"; which means that they are digging up rocks and shifting earth in serried ranks of a couple of hundred men with picks, uttering labour sounds in a prearranged rhythm which produces resonant vibrations. Enormous masses of material are displaced by leather belts, slipping and sliding on hundreds of shoulders. Trees are dragged out of the ground by chains attached to thirty, fifty or a hundred men (or women). Columns of them snake from the plain up to the hilltops like crawling ants. Bricks are made on wood fires served by the arms of twenty or thirty men. Hewn stone is lifted by block and tackle—and the muscles of twenty, thirty or fifty men (or women, of course). And rocks are crushed by raising great weights and letting them fall.

All these things can be seen in two documentary films made on the spot and brought to Europe for exhibition.

The blast-furnaces. At the edge of a misty lake and against a background of delicate birch foliage—the traditional Chinese countryside—there is now a squat tower built of primitive bricks made on the spot. It is perhaps twenty feet high, and round the top of it there is a wooden platform supported by beams, with a sloping ramp to give access to the throat of the furnace, because that is what the tower is. "Great-mass" labour is the order of the day here too, and the peasants file up and down the ramp carrying loads of iron and coal. Down below more "great-mass" labour is busy around the crucible removing the slag with rakes. There are no regenerators; a few pipes where the air enters are heated by fires kept going with every possible fuel imaginable. If the fires are too poor this "great-mass" labour blows on the flames. But despite the best they can do the temperature of the furnace remains between 300° and 400° Fahrenheit below that of an ordinary industrial furnace. "Ancient Chinese science" does its best to compensate for this by all sorts of manipulations, traditional recipes for flux, alloys and so on.

The mines. In the open country, green, brown or white according to the season of the year, "great-mass" labour digs out lumps of coal with pick, spade and hand. The labourers carry off the coal in sacks on

their backs, or slung on long poles—"ancient Chinese science" knew the principle of fulcrum leverage. Others are engaged in rolling the coal over and over again across grids through which the smaller pieces pass, and so on.

The manufacture of carborundum. The following description is taken from the account of the British Labour M.P., Richard Crossman, on his return from Peking. Carborundum is a powder made of grains so small and hard that it can be used to polish optical lenses.

"Here is the process I saw. In the middle of the yard they had set up a furnace, in which the original powder was heated up until it formed into a kind of granite rock. It was then taken out of the furnace and the rock hammered to pieces by men with long-handled hammers. Then the fragments were sieved. I shall not forget the room with no windows and some twenty people sitting holding sieves, hung on string from the ceiling, leaning backwards and forwards as they sieved by hand. The powder which went through the sieves was then transferred to an extraordinary sort of bathroom. There were four wooden steps and on each a pot, the size of an Ali-Baba pot, full of water, which was being moved, basinful by basinful, higher and higher from platform to platform by charming girls. The point of this operation was to get the powder to settle at the bottom of the water. Then it was dried, and in the next room there were girls with long magnets, extracting the grains of iron from the powder before it was packed in neat green boxes.

"I suspect that this is how we made carborundum in 1750."

The Chinese guide who had shown Crossman around this "factory" declared: "Already in our first year we are producing a finer quality than in England." Boastfulness and stupidity hand in hand, which should not surprise us.

Carpentry. The "great-mass" labour saws according to the lines laid down and the muscular rhythms discovered by their ancient Chinese science. *The smithy.* Lines of anvils stand awaiting the "great mass" of hammer blows delivered by great masses of Chinese arms. *The sewing workshop.* Batteries of sewing machines are lined up, all taken from private owners who were often able to buy them only after a lifetime of labour. Great masses of Chinese women sit there and stitch away without raising their heads and without saying a word to anyone, according to the rules of ancient Chinese science.

But the bugle sounds again. Time to eat, to go to the "refectory";

in theory a big hall somewhere or other. But these eating-halls usually exist, so far, only on paper, and the men and women eat in the open air, in the fields or on the sites, often in the rain, protecting themselves with all the devices invented for the purpose by ancient Chinese science. Great masses of bowls filled with rice and cabbage stand in lines, and each worker comes up with his own eating bowl and fills it while loudspeakers broadcast the latest Communist propaganda.

After the meal there is a short opportunity for going to the stores to get this or that small objects or articles of clothing supplied by the management, against an entitling ticket, according to the requirements plan—because of course your needs must conform with the plan. The workers, both men and women, are also given military instruction and training, because “the people of the Commune are armed”. Which in reality means that in each Commune of, say, 15,000 families, there are 1,500 militiamen recruited from the most reliable elements—almost all former cadres of the collective farms—and each one has a rifle. And among those 1,500 militiamen there is a further selection of 150 super-reliable men whose rifles are always loaded. Otherwise ammunition is kept at a central armoury guarded day and night by special police armed with machine-guns. As an extra precaution the personnel of this guard is changed every two months.

When the military instruction is over the columns re-form and march off back to work: adolescents, young men, old men, young women and old women, all together—not that it is at all easy to tell which sex is which, seeing that their clothing is all the same and they all look harassed and exhausted. However, we are asked to believe that the women are particularly joyful about it all, as witness the following in the *Ta Kung Pao* of November 6, 1958:

“In our company, all the women are there, ceaselessly at work. . . . We all eat together in the refectory, and immediately after the meal we return to the fields to work hard again. Our enthusiasm for work could not be greater. After a hard day we continue to work on in ‘the evening battle’ (which lasts until midnight). No one complains, and no one tries to avoid her fair share of the work to the detriment of others. . . . At Hai Ting, near Peking, after the harvest work, we women of the village formed ourselves into ‘shock brigades’ and challenged the men to a deep ploughing competition. . . . In our hearts we are proud and content. We feel ourselves really liberated.”

After a further five hours of this "liberating" labour the columns return, though not to rest, because there are further military exercises: hand-grenade throwing, attacks on bridges and so on. Then comes the common meal; after which there are political lectures, self-criticism and socialist competition, or perhaps a return to further work in 'the evening battle'. Once a week there is "recreation", with propaganda films or operas with didactic themes. Once a month there is an edifying dance under the presidency of the Executive Council of the Commune.

This brief sketch of life in one of the People's Communes is confirmed by the Peking *People's Daily*,³ which writes:

"During the past few months . . . the peasants have worked without bothering about pay. Wherever they were needed, there they were; just so long as their muscles could be of any use. They worked night and day, eating and sleeping at their work. Among them were the very young, the very old, and the women. No one was afraid of long and heavy labour. . . . The peasants have handed over the remains of their possessions and their personal tools to the Communes. They have left it to the Party to arrange their conditions of life."

The article concludes by saying that after such an immense effort the peasants deserve a little recreation. As a result of this directive, full of paternal solicitude for the peasants, the Communes were given the right to insert one or two evenings of recreation such as I have described in my own sketch. At first there was no question of any such recreation, and, as in every Communist undertaking at the start, every nerve was strained to the maximum, often to the extent of fantastic excesses. A shower of "rectifications" was then necessary to bring them back to the "normal excesses" without which everyday Communist life is unthinkable.

Incidentally, it was in connection with such "rectifications" that a ray or two of truth managed to emerge from the gloom; for example, a report which appeared in the *New Observer* of Peking.⁴ According to this report a travelling group of players arrived at a People's Commune near Kalgan in order to give a few performances. But fearing that this would give the peasants ideas deleterious to production, the Director of

³ *People's Daily*, Peking, November 20, 1958. The issue of August 6 mentions the case of a peasant of eighty-seven who returned from work in the fields at midnight.

⁴ *New Observer*, Peking, November 20, 1958.

the Commune ordered the members of the company to take part in the work of the Commune instead of wasting time giving their performances. And as this saved his own men and women the cost of the seats, he further ordered that they should contribute the money to the communal funds.

Or the following letter, which poignantly reveals the real features of the "great leap forward". We see from it that the movement caused similar ravages in the towns. (However, the extension of the People's Communes to the towns was stopped in December 1958, and this letter was one of those which was used for the "psychological preparation" of this retreat.)

"Comrade Editor, I am an employee of the People's Bank and a member of the Communist Youth. I feel a deep and ardent love for the Party and I take part in all its political campaigns. Since the Central Committee has mobilised us all in the struggle for 'ten million tons of steel' the whole Chinese people has made a tremendous effort. My wife puddles steel at her school, my mother puddles steel with her street organisation, and I puddle steel at the bank. It is very hard work and it keeps us occupied day and night. As a good part of the employees of the bank are kept busy with this work, the remainder of those who stay behind at the bank have to do the work of those who are away puddling steel. We work a twelve-hour day, and we have no rest on Sundays. At first I was healthy and vigorous, but this laborious life has been going on for so long now that I am near exhaustion. . . . After the rectification campaign I thought that we should be able to have a little recreation. But instead of that we then had 'the great leap forward for the production of cereals'. And now comes 'the great leap forward for the production of steel'. . . . When shall we ever again be able to go to the cinema on Sundays or visit our friends?"

And you must not think that all this harassing extra labour is paid—not at all. There were one or two timid suggestions to this effect on the part of some workers, but they only aroused the indignation of *The Workers Journal* (the "Workers" journal, mark you!), which wrote in an editorial on December 18, 1958, that it was scandalous that there were "certain workers" who even demanded pay for producing steel! This high-minded journal also denounced the sabotage of those workers "who pretend that they can't work at night after a hard day's stint for fear of ruining their health". Think of that! And the article

concludes with the lofty rebuke: "They do not understand that the participation of the workers in this *hard labour* is done for *Communism*, and therefore must be done without pay." And they tell us that Communism is introduced in order to get hard labour either eliminated or better paid!

SUCCESS GOES TO THE HEAD

As I have already pointed out, all Communist undertakings begin with fantastic excesses, and it is not until there has been an accumulation of victims, a good deal of damage, and a shower of self-criticism that the excesses are reduced to "normal". The new régime then goes on at what might be called its cruising speed. The first phase, made up of blood, sweat and hysterical "enthusiasm", is the phase in which, to use the famous Stalinist phrase, "success goes to the head"—and disaster is just round the corner.

This phase was not absent at the start of the People's Communes. On December 10, 1958, the world was allowed to know that the Central Committee of the Communist Party had been in secret session for two whole weeks at Wuhan to draw up a "Leninist balance" of this first hysterical phase. Among other things this "Leninist balance" revealed that the majority of the crockery and utensils taken away from the peasants had been dumped here, there and everywhere, and were now lying around going to rack and ruin because the collective canteens which were to use them had not yet been organised; that half the requisitioned sewing machines were broken down and in need of repair because they had come into the hands of people who didn't know how to use them; that the steel produced in the soup tureens, grandiloquently termed "rural blast-furnaces", wasn't worth the amount of rice the peasants engaged on producing it could have cultivated in the same time; and that the rate of industrial sickness and industrial accidents as a result of exhaustion had shot up fantastically. The general public also learned from this report that a veritable epidemic of suicides had swept over certain provinces, and that in the case of old men the local kanpous had even glorified the act as a supreme sacrifice since it saved the State expense and trouble. All in all it was quite clear that, once again, "success had gone to Communist heads".

The resolution of the Central Committee adopted at this secret session condemned the worst excesses. For one thing, it called a halt to the establishment of People's Communes in the towns, explaining apologetically that this was because "a bourgeois spirit" still prevailed

there. By the way, this "explanation" is quite remarkable since Marxism has always taught that the towns are pre-eminently the centres of the revolutionary spirit. As far as the requisitions in the countryside were concerned, the resolution declared that they must not be carried into effect before the planned communal habitations are ready for occupation. Further, in the future a certain small proportion of wages must be paid out in nationally legal tender; and—illuminating innovation!—workers must be allowed a minimum of five hours' sleep at night. Those rural blast-furnaces, mines and other industrial undertakings which have proved unprofitable are to be abandoned. Finally this resolution, which is yards long as usual, produces solemn and involved explanations to show that the general line of the Party was, as always, infallible; that all errors and defects were due to the "excessive zeal" of subordinate officials; that the stage of the phase of the process arrived at was not the process of the phase of the stage intended; and that payment "according to needs", and not according to labour, which the guilty subordinate officials had introduced, was rooted in the bourgeois ideal of equalitarianism. Incidentally we meet another old Communist trick here: equalitarianism is denounced as bourgeois in Communist countries, and praised as Communist in capitalist countries.

All in all, however, this resolution does not of course represent any real change, as has been suggested in the West; it merely reduces speed. Its object is to adjust means, and not to change aims. And further, there was nothing sensational about this secret session at Wuhan with regard to Mao either. He is no longer President of the Republic—Stalin never was—but he remains leader of the Communist Party, and that is the key position of power in China. The People's Communes were and are his work. Unfortunately both they and he continue to exist.

FROM WAGE WORKER TO BONDAGE;

FROM BONDAGE TO SLAVERY

The fundamental, historic, role of the collective farm is to reduce the independent peasantry to the status of wage workers. Under totalitarian State capitalism, as instituted by all Communist powers, the status of the wage worker in his turn is reduced to the status of bondage, because he no longer has the right to leave his job and take other employment, to negotiate his rates of pay, and to go on strike in the absence of a satisfactory settlement. Now the proletarianised

peasants still had—like the serfs of the Middle Ages—their own cottages, their own families and households, a few tools of their own with which they could make themselves simple clothing or repair the roof when necessary, a garden in which to grow vegetables, a yard in which to keep chickens, a sty in which to keep a pig, a regular if small wage; and they could spend their evenings in peace at the family hearth. In short, at least they had the rudimentary elements of a private life. But with the advent of the People's Communes all these little advantages were abolished and the one-time independent peasants, become wage workers, were now reduced to slavery, real and literal slavery, slaves on land turned into a great manufactory belonging to the State.

In the People's Communes men and women are no longer in sovereign possession of their own bodies, and it is this which distinguishes slavery from bondage or serfdom. They no longer have a private life at all. Each individual is no longer attached to a family. He is "free", free in the sense that he is completely mobile and can be sent anywhere at a moment's notice to do anything as the result of a decision taken in some far-off office over whose doings he has no control whatever. His wages are paid according to production and according to the zeal with which he works—these criteria are laid down in the decree of August 29, 1958. In addition to working, he must show good-will, or, in other words, complete submission. And what is more, his wages are being increasingly paid in kind. In any case, what could he do with money? He is not allowed to go anywhere, and should he try to he would find all the roads barred. What could he buy with money anyway, seeing that everything a good worker needs for the building up of Socialism is already provided for him by the management? What little money he does receive is paper money issued by the Commune itself, and it has no legal tender outside the Commune. It is merely a coupon valid only for exchange against goods supplied by the Commune. In this way the last vestige of personal independence, which consists of earning, if only a little, money with which he can buy whatever he pleases on the open market, is rapidly disappearing.

You would expect the realisation of this fact, almost incredible but nevertheless true, that in our century a whole people—and such a fine people, too—is being gradually reduced to a condition of complete slavery by its government, would cause a wave of tremendous indignation to rise all over the world. But the hearts of men have been so dried out by the sacrificial cult of planning, industrialisation and the

so-called "historical process", the spirit of man has been so corrupted by the sophism that a desirable end justifies the means to attain it, that many of our contemporaries have fallen into a kind of cruel idolatry of "Steel" and "History". Communists have only to proclaim that they are producing "Steel" in terms of the "historical process", and many people who ought to know better go down on their knees in awe and admiration. In this way so many people who have talked about the People's Communes in China airily ignore the vast amount of human suffering the scheme has brought about and see only the economic end it is supposed to bring about. Since such people insist on the greater importance of the non-human aspects of this process, let us follow them on to that ground too.

What are the possible economic virtues of these People's Communes? They simplify management and administration. That is true; previously there were overlapping efforts by collective-farm administrations, municipalities and government departments. From now on—the final decision was taken on December 25, 1958—there is only one administrative bureaucracy in the countryside, that of the People's Communes. Sole authority for everything lies in the hands of the Executive Council of the Commune; in practice this means in the hands of the secretary of the Council, who is invariably an official of the Communist Party. The Council of the Commune is in charge of just everything: municipal, agricultural, commercial, industrial, educational, political and military tasks—the last-mentioned because the Commune is the lowest geographical military unit.

This arrangement certainly does simplify the administration, but the simplification does not necessarily mean that it is more economical, because the number of bureaucrats has not diminished. The few dozen posts, such as mayor, president and brigade leaders on the collective farms, and so on, being now within the People's Communes are replaced by police, military and administrative posts.

Is diffused instead of concentrated agrarian-industrial production perhaps the superior method? That would, of course, be a reversal of a notion which is so firmly established that the Communists have accepted it as well as the capitalists; that is to say that the division of labour is the essential well-spring of all efficient production. The golden rule of all economic systems which aspire to be regarded as "modern" is to concentrate for the production of, say, steel, all the means of modern metallurgical technology into the hands and the places best suited for such production, and the same is true, of course,

with regard to all other forms of production, including the production of foodstuffs.

The People's Communes have certainly done nothing to disprove this golden rule. The superiority of the division of labour can be seen, quite clearly, from those very figures of which Peking is so proud. It would appear that those tens of thousands of rural blast-furnaces are operated by a labour force which, if put into some full-time occupation, would represent, roughly speaking, something like two million men. Now this great labour army produces about ten million tons of steel annually. In France, for example, about 100,000 steel workers produce fifteen million tons of steel, and in addition pig iron and other metals. Thus labour productivity in these concentrated centres of French steel production is about *thirty times as great* as that prevailing in those innumerable small productive units served by unskilled Chinese peasants. Of course, similar figures could be produced for the other industrial countries of the West—or for the Soviet Union. And this takes no account of the fact that the *quality* of the steel produced by the sweat of millions of Chinese industrial slaves is very poor. All the same, the use of these millions of unskilled workmen for the production of steel is profitable—provided that they are not paid for their work. Thus the advantage of the whole operation arises from the unpaid exploitation of the workmen engaged in it, and not from the decentralisation of production. In fact, from the standpoint of economic efficiency, one can only conclude that the “great-mass” production as demonstrated in the Chinese People's Communes is a simply fantastic misapplication of human labour power.

In order to provide some sort of doctrinal justification for this “great-mass” principle Mao has invented an *ad hoc* theory on “strength by population”, that is to say by increasing the birth rate. Previously he was in favour of the exact contrary, and was highly praised by Western “progressive intellectuals”, who pointed out enthusiastically that for the first time in history there was an Asian government which had sufficient moral courage to accept the tenets of Malthusianism and openly favour birth control. Even this wasn't true, of course, because Nehru's government in India, and the Japanese Government, take the same attitude to uncontrolled births. But, although the Communist Government in Peking was not unique in demonstrating this moral courage, it did at least face the facts proclaimed by all sensible observers, namely that China—like Indonesia, India and Japan—is over-populated, and that this excess of population makes her weak, not strong.

As a result of this realisation, the Chinese Communist Government ordered birth-control propaganda and the distribution of contraceptives—amidst the plaudits of its admirers all over the world. Then suddenly it swung the helm over completely, prohibited abortion, and demanded more and more children—yet the same admirers continued their plaudits for the new policy which was diametrically opposed to the old. Obviously, birth control is good or evil, revolutionary or reactionary, according to whether the gentlemen in Peking find it fits into their book or not. And there is always *dialectics* to fall back on to justify the one or the other as the case may be.

Be it noted that the Peking Government did not merely stop its birth-control propaganda with a typical abruptness, but it plunged off immediately in the opposite direction with a harshness thoroughly worthy of Communism. The pseudo-sociological arguments put forward to justify more and more births in a country which already has six hundred million inhabitants are of no importance; what does really matter is the way in which the Chinese Communist Government is trying to force a population of six hundred million to become a population of seven hundred million. Having broken up family life, it now ordains copulations at certain times and in certain places just as stud managers do in Europe. These may be between legitimate spouses if they happen to have been roped into the same People's Commune, which is not always the case; if not, then other partners are chosen.

This system aroused the disgust of Doctor Chandra-Sekhar, a Professor of Economics at the University of Madras, and at a press conference on December 17, 1958, in Hongkong, on his return from a visit to China, he declared that the People's Communes were like "vast zoos, where human beings were concentrated and coupled like beasts". Thinking that they could rely on the complaisance shown in official Indian circles towards Communism, the Peking rulers of China invited a Hindu, who had up to that time shown a good deal of sympathy towards them, as the first foreigner to be introduced to the People's Communes. He was Professor Chandra-Sekhar, who spent over a month on this tour of inspection. But despite his previous sympathies, he was horrified by what he saw, and was honest enough to admit it. "I did not see one happy face," he reported. "The expression of suffering on the faces of the peasants was an indication of the extreme poverty to which they have been reduced and of the intolerable burden which has been placed on them. . . . Human nature has its limits."

As the economic theories it puts forward to justify overstepping these limits just won't hold water, Peking takes refuge in lyricism, and tries to arouse the patriotic instincts of the people, particularly with regard to what it calls "ancient Chinese science". Such an appeal to look backward comes strangely from "revolutionaries" who have previously always prided themselves on their efforts to shake the country out of its torpor and out of its reliance precisely on that "ancient science" and bring it to adopt more modern methods. Whenever Mao's admirers in the West have to excuse the cruelties and brutalities of his dictatorship, they always say that such things are unavoidable in order to bring the Chinese people to break with their out-dated habits and customs and to arouse them from their sleep in an archaic past. No doubt these same apologists will now find the official return to this archaic past admirable too. One hundred Arab tailors produce similar marvels with their "ancient science", each man sitting in a corner of his *soukh* with one end of a thread round his big toe and the other held by a youthful assistant, but no one dreams of finding this procedure a "great leap forward".

The "ancient science of China" is only one chord among many others which the leaders in Peking have set throbbing. If anyone else treated us to such noises, Mao's apologists would find it "reactionary", "chauvinist" and so on. But when Mao talks of the ancient virtues of the race, the ancient customs, the ancient wars and the ancient conquests, they find it quite in order. With Hitler it was different. . . . And when one thinks how these same apologists almost swooned with enthusiasm at the thought that Mao had dared to abandon the stick-in-the-mud customs and habits which had made China a backward country; that he had consigned the old classics to the attic! That was foolish of them, of course, because although it may not be good for a country to get itself bogged down in its classics, this doesn't mean that the best place for them is in the attic. Today the same apologists are preparing to swoon with admiration once more because Mao's government lauds these same classics to the skies—which is just as foolish an excess in the opposite direction, because although the classics remain of great value, they are certainly not of great assistance in the puddling of steel. There is just as much obscurantism in burying the past as there is in letting oneself be buried by it.

In any case, Mao's praises of "the good old times" are hypocritical as usual, because he picks out only those bits which serve his own purpose: one or two ancient recipes for the extraction of minerals, and

one or two odes in praise of war. But he preserves the silence of the grave with regard to all those things in China's past which relate to humanism, individual independence and, above all, the family spirit. As far as family traditions are concerned, and they are particularly rich and persistent in China, all the efforts of the régime are turned towards suppressing them and not towards supporting them.

The suppression of the family is an essential part of the "great leap forward". Experience in Hungary, and to some extent even in the Soviet Union, has shown that the attempts of totalitarian Communism to create a new robot human being have not been successful. Now the Chinese Communist Party puts that failure down to the continued existence of the family, and the declarations of its leading spokesmen on the point are very revealing. Madame Kan K'e Ch'ing, who is Vice-President of the Pan-China Federation of Democratic Women ("People's" Democracy, of course!) asks pertinently: "What is the use of giving children a Communist education in the schools if they get a non-Communist education in their homes?" And the Vice-President is not prepared to leave it at that; she pursues the trend of her thought quite frankly: "The egoistic and feudal ideas of parents lead them to regard children as their personal property, and this develops 'bourgeois inclinations' in the children, who in their turn regard their parents as *their* property, and do not think they have the right to carry other children on their backs . . . they also regard their toys as their personal property . . . and assume that only grown-ups ought to take part in production."⁵ The conclusion then comes pat: "In future we must organise the whole life of the children in the crèches and in boarding schools; in short, we should remove them as quickly and as radically as possible from the family atmosphere which perverts them." You see, it is in the family that the children are first imbued with what is, from the Communist point of view, the most pernicious of all ideas; namely, that on this earth everyone has the right to a piece of life of his own, to his personal little circle, and that he is entitled to arrange this patch of privacy as he pleases, without the State butting in.

It does not entirely meet the case to complain that the Chinese Communists are nationalising the children and reducing their parents to slavery; they are doing more than this; they are militarising them too. When I used the words sections, brigades, regiments and barracks earlier on to describe the new organisation of the Chinese villages under Communism those terms were not intended to be figurative;

⁵ *People's Daily*, Peking, November 13, 1958.

they are the terms officially employed in China today. In fact the total militarisation of the country is one of the fundamental and avowed objectives of the régime. An editorial in *The Red Flag*⁶ explains that the aim of the People's Communes is "to organise themselves on military lines . . . to carry out their tasks as though in battle"; in short, to organise civil tasks with the same collective discipline which regulates the life and operations of soldiers. As I have already mentioned, the members of the Commune are roused from sleep every morning by the reveille; they fall in on the parade ground; they march off in ordered ranks; if they are ill, they report sick as soldiers do; and if they break any of the regulations, they are punished with the appropriate sanction laid down in them. Military instruction and training form an important part of their communal life. Propaganda, including films, is used to inflame their martial ardour, and they are encouraged with posters showing a sabre in the hands of six hundred million people cutting off the heads of the imperialist hydra.

WHY THE ARTIFICIALLY INDUCED RAGE?

The reasons for this Cyclopean rage which has seized on the Communist rulers in Peking are worth examining. You would have thought that their "plans" and their "campaigns" had already pushed the regimentation of the people and the labour norms imposed on them to the very limit. What threat, therefore, or what extraordinary seizure, has now compelled these rulers to step up the regimentation still higher and even to intensify the labour norms?

Mao Tse-tung has made no effort to conceal the threat which hangs over him. According to an article published in *The Red Flag* on September 15, 1958, he feels that the troops he holds concentrated in certain strategic spots might not be sufficient to repel an invasion by the "imperialists" from Formosa. In fact, if such an invasion did take place, the danger would not be so much from the military strength of the invaders, but from the popular risings which would take place in support of them all over the country. Such risings must therefore be prevented before they have a chance of developing. That is why Mao organises his praetorian militia all over the country, and that is why he is concentrating the population in the People's Communes, where he can keep an eye on them better and have them always under his own guns.

⁶ *The Red Flag*, September 1, 1958. Actual quotation taken from Robert Guillain.

And another thing: once the population is regimented and rigorously confined to barracks, it would also be unable to revolt against the launching of a war of conquest. The deliberately chauvinist campaign which is being conducted by the Chinese Communists suggests that their military intentions in reforming the People's Communes are not entirely defensive. It is possible that the régime has wide-scale offensive designs in order at one blow to dissipate discontent at home and take advantage of the defeatism prevalent abroad; because it is a fact that the countries which adjoin or are the near neighbours of China—India, Indonesia, Burma and Cambodia in particular, and perhaps to a lesser but nonetheless important extent, Thailand and Japan—have been infiltrated with men and doctrines favourable to Communism, and the rulers of those countries have never taken any serious steps to counter it. The fact is that the Peking Government suffers the hostility of its own people and enjoys the approval of the intelligentsia in the neighbouring countries; that is a formidable combination of circumstances, and one which has always encouraged dictators to commit foreign aggression. This is all the more the case because Formosa hangs like a sword of Damocles over the heads of Mao and his friends, and they are therefore inclined to believe that the best method of defence is attack, *i.e.* the preventive invasion of Formosa. However the attempt made on Quemoy was sufficient to convince Peking that its forces were far from effective enough to make such coups a matter of practical politics—hence the need to build up enormous military strength as quickly as possible; hence the “great leap forward”, and the feverish hyper-chauvinist style in which it is being conducted. As the whole capacity of heavy industry in China is being reserved for military production, the system of People's Communes has been launched in order to provide the masses with at least the rudiments of life.

THE RETURN TO RAMSES

If these are the motives for the frenzy with which the People's Communes are being pushed forward, and it certainly looks as though they are, then at least it should be noted that in effect they underline a cardinal admission: namely that the Chinese people detest the Communist régime in their country. If they did not—if, on the contrary, they supported it—then the threat of invasion by the Kuomintang forces would not be serious. Further, it would not be necessary for the Communist rulers of China to go baby-snatching if there were not

the fear that life itself would turn them against the régime. Thus truth itself breaks through the thick fog of inventions and twaddle emitted by "progressive intellectuals" in the West: as soon as the Chinese people had a chance of seeing the sinister works of the Communists once they were in power, they have never ceased to oppose them, and in a great variety of ways; sometimes silently and passively; sometimes by vehement criticism as at the time of the "Hundred Flowers" campaign; sometimes openly and violently. The revolts against the Communist power are already innumerable. The "Resistance" has been destroyed again and again, and yet it always revives in the mountains. Sabotage and the killing of Communist agents carrying out requisitions are endemic. Tibet under Communist domination is a latent volcano.⁷ The Communist monolith is being erected on shifting lava. The formation of the People's Communes, trumpeted abroad as a great success, in reality betrays the secret fears of the dictators.

To that inevitable resistance the rulers of Peking have only one answer: to press ahead still more desperately. The more the horse bucks, the tighter the rider pulls the reins; and the tighter the rider pulls the reins, the more the horse bucks. So the peasants detest the collectivisation? Very well, then press ahead with still more collectivisation. They must be even more regimented and even more strictly controlled than before. So the peasants detest the People's Communes even more than they detested the collective farms? Of course! It is a vicious circle which no dictatorship has ever been able to escape.

There is ample proof of the despair these Communes have produced. Already there are reports of revolts, mass suicides, the burning down of Commune buildings, and so on. How could it be otherwise? What people, no matter how lethargic, could stand by in silence and without protest and see its homes destroyed, its families broken up, the graves of its ancestors desecrated, its humble possessions confiscated, its days turned into one long life of suffering without even surcease at night?

Some purblind "sympathisers" have been conscienceless enough to talk about "True Communism" in connection with this hell on earth, and to recall the speculations of certain visionary socialists of the past century on the possibility of bringing up children collectively. They forget that those theories were put forward with a view to giving parents *greater liberty* and not in order to enslave them more thoroughly,

⁷ This was written before the Tibetan revolt.

and with a view to making the children themselves more *independent*, and not more *subject* to the State. And the State those old Socialists had in mind was a democratic State, the guardian of the cultural patrimony of all; not a totalitarian State imposing a stifling conformism on everyone. In other words, the State they had in mind was a State subject to the welfare of the people and not a Pharaonic State like that of the Communists. And as for family possessions and personal possessions, the founders of the socialist idea spent a good deal of their lives in explaining that they had not the slightest desire to collectivise them, and that the things they did wish to place in common ownership were the means of production, the factories and so on. They made positively desperate efforts to assure people that the charge made against them by the "Reactionaries", that Socialism meant "the nationalisation of wheelbarrows and women", was false. Today it would seem that the Communist rulers in Peking are making just as desperate efforts to lend substance to that charge as it applies to them. Not that it matters much. If some people, rightly or wrongly, see any sort of relationship between the stud farms of the People's Communes and those early proposals, then they must throw those books away at the sight of the kind of life men are compelled to lead in these Communes.

Some "sympathisers" have even had the impertinence to compare the Chinese People's Communes to the *Kibbutzim* in Israel, although they are fundamentally different. Married couples remain together in the *Kibbutzim*. It is true that the children are brought up collectively, but at the end of the day they are collected from the centres by their parents who then have them for the evening. Work in the *Kibbutzim* is hard too, but it is human, and it is organised in free discussion between the members of the *Kibbutzim*; and their decisions are not over-ridden by the outside interference of the State. The members of the *Kibbutzim* share their working clothes, but only their working clothes. They often live in common it is true, but not on principle; on the contrary, when a *Kibbutz* is well established and has accumulated sufficient funds it builds special individual cottages for its married couples—and very nice cottages they are, for I have seen many of them myself. And, above all—above all, let it be stressed—people join the *Kibbutzim* of their own free will, and they can leave them again at will. The basic principle of the *Kibbutzim* is voluntary—a true and authentic voluntarism. The system has never embraced more than a quarter of the rural population of Israel, and not only is each member free to leave

if he wishes, but each *Kibbutz* can dissolve itself at any time if its members so decide.

No, all these various attempts to whitewash the undertaking of the overlords of Peking with the honourable prestige of former Messianism, or present-day enthusiasms elsewhere, are fraudulent. But there is one accurate historical comparison, and that is to a very far-off stage of human development, and one which was so terrible that even today, four thousand years later, its horror still oppresses the memory of mankind. These great working camps of the Chinese People's Communes in which great volumes of earth, rock and stone are shifted by "great-mass" labour under the rifles of the *kanpous*, are readily identifiable historically. They are the modern revivals of those vast slave armies of Cheops and Nineveh, the masses of slaves who, under the whips of overseers, built the Pyramids, dug the canals, tilled the soil, and provided the copper and the iron for the armies of the Pharaohs. They are the modern revivals of the vast slave camps which built the Great Wall of China, to which the Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang Ti sacrificed the lives of millions of slave workmen. That is the tragic human past which Mao is reviving after two thousand years of struggle to free mankind. That is how far back the "great leap forward" has taken the unfortunate people of China under the Communist dictatorship.

THE BANK CLERK CHANG

ONCE again I made the enchanted journey from my hotel, which was situated on the south side of the island of Hongkong, to the refugee camp, which was perched high on a hill in the New Territories. So far I had feasted my eyes avidly on the spectacle around me: the impressive landscape which looked as though it owed something to the palette of Gauguin, the junks and sampans of the floating villages, the rectangular modern buildings of Victoria rising like a challenge to the chaos all around. I would await with interest the arrival of the ferry, watching the swarms of passers-by in their variegated clothing, and then enjoy the crossing among the many scores of small craft like those we see in the old Chinese prints.

But after the sixth time my artistic interest in the surroundings flagged a little. I settled myself comfortably on a bench and began a conversation with the worthy Fung, my interpreter, and a corpulent chemist of Hongkong who was making the journey with us. The subject of "Secret Societies" came up again and again in the conversation of my companions and I asked Fung to tell me something about them. Fung was not only a small man but he was also timid by disposition and he did not talk a great deal without encouragement. Whatever he knew had to be extracted from him as though with forceps. However, at my insistence, he began with the usual humility which Chinese canons of politeness impose by assuring me that he was really very ignorant on the subject. Playing my part I assured him that, on the contrary, I regarded him as a very well-informed man. After that, with the occasional assistance of the corpulent chemist, Fung told me the story.

THE SECRET SOCIETIES

The three most venerable institutions of old China are the ancestral cult, the Emperor and the secret societies. From time immemorial Chinese who have felt a desire to revise a phrase of Confucius, found a

new religion, do a bit of smuggling, overthrow a government, or merely swindle the excise, have come together in secret societies for the purpose: the Nimble Crescents, the Green Dragons, the Jade Crowns and so on, pursuing their objectives in a great display of esoteric pomp. For example, at the beginning of the present era there was a secret society known as the Red Eyebrows, which consisted of peasants who painted their eyebrows red as a sort of gang recognition sign. This society was the backbone of what became known as the "Hunger Revolt" which cost the lives of a million people, including that of the usurping Emperor Wang Mang, against whom it was directed. A century and a half later there was another secret society, known this time as the Yellow Turbans. This was founded by Shamanists who practised certain eccentric solar and agricultural rites in the cottage temples of the villages. In a period of great privations this society also led a revolt and the countryside was ravaged in a wave of Chinese Jacquerie.

In the same era there was a family of Taoist magicians, the Changs, who were organised in the Szechwan, another secret society which played an important political role. Later on there were secret societies which claimed affiliation with Buddhism, though the latter regarded them as heretics—for example the White Cloud and the White Lotus. This heretical sect, which announced the re-coming of Maitraya, the Buddhist Messiah, was founded around the year 1133 with a Grand Master and nocturnal gatherings. These particular secret societies were vigorously suppressed by the Song Emperors because they sought to establish the Mongol Dynasty of Genghis Khan. When the followers of Genghis Khan did finally come to power they showed their gratitude by granting these secret societies official recognition.

But in 1308 the White Lotus Society began to conspire again at its nocturnal meetings—chase nature out of the door and it returns by the window—which now became centres for the enemies of the Mongol Dynasty. The plotters secured the adhesion of certain army chiefs, half-patriots, half-bandits, and also of the peasants, exasperated by the frequent famines, and their operations were so successful that a revolt broke out in 1352 in the Cantonese area of the Yangtsekiang. It spread like wildfire and swept away the Genghis Khan régime.

Five centuries later came the Heavenly Reason sect, half-political, half-magical, a remote offshoot of the former White Lotus Society, and in its secret confabulations it plotted the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty. On July 13, 1813, its supporters attacked the Imperial

Palace in Peking and almost succeeded in assassinating the Manchu Emperor.

It was at this time that the T'ai P'ing came into being. T'ai P'ing means Great Purity. This was also a Messianic society which proclaimed the coming of the millennium and was led by miracle-mongering illuminati. Like all the secret societies which constantly recur in Chinese history, this one also took advantage of a period of famine to recruit half-starved peasants, unpaid soldiers and unemployed bandits, holding them together and arousing their fanaticism by spiritual beliefs. Their prophet, the Cantonese Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, who had visions, had come into contact with English Protestant missionaries, and he now preached an ill-assorted blend of misunderstood Christianity and native beliefs, giving himself out to be the younger son of God and calling himself the Celestial King. A branch of this T'ai P'ing, the Black Banners, also opposed the French when they established their protectorate in Tonkin.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century came another famous secret society, the Heavenly Fist of Concord and Justice, which became notorious in the rest of the world under the name of Boxers. This secret society arose in the province of Shantung, the hotbed of peasant risings encouraged by secret societies. The Boxers were affiliated to the secret societies known as the Great Knife and the White Nenuphar. Like the T'ai P'ing half-a-century before them, they professed a mixture of milleniarism, magic, miracle-mongering, prophecy and social demands.

These secret societies, like all the others which preceded them, would naturally have directed their conspiratorial activities against the reigning power, in this case the Manchu Dynasty, if the latter had not been sufficiently cunning to turn them against the "Foreign Devils" who were then in the process of dividing up China between them. The Boxers therefore concentrated their fanaticism against the White imperialists. The name "Boxers" caught on because they claimed that they would be able to drive the foreigners out of the Concessions with their fists alone. Once the Emperor was quite certain that the hostility of the new secret society had been switched in the right direction, *i.e.* against the foreigners, he openly lent them his patronage. Encouraged in this way the followers of the Great Knife Society suddenly attacked the German Mission in Kiachow and murdered two missionaries, and at the end of 1899 an English missionary suffered the same martyrdom.

"What happened to the secret societies when Mao came to power?" I asked Fung.

"All the previous secret societies, with the exception of the Boxers, had started off with magic practices and ended in attempts to overthrow this or that dynasty; and so they were regarded as a threat to the new régime too. Mao knew perfectly well that his ruthless methods would soon arouse resentment, and that it could be much more effectively canalised if there were a secret society or societies to lead the malcontents. The Communists themselves were well aware from their own experience how effective clandestine activities can be so they took severe measures against all those secret societies which still existed. One of their great mopping-up actions once they came to power was therefore to persecute and destroy them. After the adherents of the Kuomintang, the first people to be denounced, deported or shot everywhere, were the members of secret societies. In fact, during the years 1950-2, the best known of the secret societies, the Blue Ribbon in Shanghai and its rival the Red Ribbon, which were more or less religious, and also the Great Sabres, which, despite its name, occupied itself almost entirely with charitable work and mutual aid, provided even more victims than the Kuomintang itself. It was only later that the turn of the capitalists came round."

At that moment we arrived at the quay from which the water buses set off for Rennie's Hill. I took my seat beside a young Chinese mother with a small child on her back. She had another child in her arms, and two little girls clung to her skirt. I asked her how old she was and she told me she was nineteen.



We walked up the slope to Rennie's Hill and a tropical sun beat down on us. There was not a breath of air and it was almost like being in an oven—with no lid. We stopped for lunch in a cheap eating-house with cracked walls, wooden tables stained with the food, rice schnaps and tea of generations, but the doorway was like the frame to that Utrillo which pursued me everywhere here: the luminous and expressionist Hongkong.

The first thing produced for my delectation was a large glass of boiling-hot tea, the customary aperitif in China, where, it appears, you pour boiling-hot liquid fire into your interior in order to cool yourself. As a matter of fact that glass of hot tea did quench my thirst more than all the ice-cooled orangeades of the morning. Anyone undertaking that

journey without return into the fires of hell would be well advised to provide himself with boiling-hot tea on the way.

In order to save time I suggested that I should interview someone during lunch, and a former bank clerk named Chang agreed to be my victim. He had the reserved, even rather obsequious attitude of a good commercial employee, a round amiable face and thick lips. He looked the type who is sparing of words because a little ashamed of feelings, and sparing of feelings because a little afraid of words. Whilst he told me about his experiences one Chinese dish followed the other in almost dizzy succession: lobster with bamboo shoots, chopped pork with soya, and so on, and so on. The premises were not reassuring, the kitchen was little more than a hole, the Neanderthal man might have used the same utensils to prepare his food, and I therefore put the first bite to my mouth with some apprehension. There was no need; it was excellent—even the long-buried eggs. These Chinese cooks reminded me of those minor Blue Ribbon holders in France, who, working in wretched kitchens, with perhaps a window giving on to an ill-kept lavatory, will nevertheless place a *bœuf bourguignon* before you capable of making the three Michelin stars pale in their courses. But to get back to Chang, as he could speak English fairly fluently there was no need for an interpreter.

"Thanks to my knowledge of English and to the connections of my father, who is now dead, I secured a position in a big Anglo-Chinese bank in Dairen," he began. "After the Communist seizure of power the bank became a mixed undertaking with joint State and private ownership. I never really understood just what this formula meant, but it certainly involved the frequent appearance of Communist agents at our shoulders. I think I may say that I always did my job conscientiously and well, and in consequence I earned rapid promotion, until in the end I was in charge of all foreign deposits. As I was in a responsible position I must say I didn't much care for these people constantly popping up behind me to look over my shoulder. One day I even said something of the sort to one of these Communist 'inspectors', but very politely; he apologised equally politely and made a note of my remark in his little book, saying that it would help to improve relationships between the old employees and those of the government, 'in accordance with the directives of President Mao'. One week after this I was handed a circular calling on me to confess all the defalcations of which I had been guilty since the coming of Communism. On reading it I felt as though someone had

suddenly boxed my ears, and at the same time my heart began to thump.

"As even the most elementary things had in the meantime almost disappeared from the shops it must now and again have been a great temptation to take a little paper, a brush and, say, a small bottle of ink, perhaps for a younger brother still at school. But my brothers were all above school age, and when I got home after the day's work I had neither time nor inclination to write. My spare time was now largely taken up by all the political lectures and meetings we were compelled to attend. All I wanted was to rest and chat to my mother, perhaps about my dead father and the memory of happier days. I had never stolen anything, not even such minor things, and that was the trouble."

"I'm not sure whether I understood aright. Did you say that the trouble was that you had never stolen anything?"

"Yes, I did. You'll understand what I mean in a moment. The next day the secretary of the Communist cell at the bank summoned me and the other employees who had also received the same circular, and delivered us a lecture explaining that although we were only minor employees and with no capital of our own, we had voluntarily become servants of capitalist high finance, and by that very fact we had necessarily developed a capitalist conscience. We were, he went on to explain, not going to be charged with that. He and his comrades quite understood that we had had to earn our living somehow under the joint régime of the Kuomintang and the foreign imperialists. However, our capitalist outlook had led us to commit improprieties. The only way for us to make good was to confess our faults there and then."

It occurred to me as Chang was speaking that the Communists were obviously applying the technique of psycho-analysis, having always done their best to ridicule it: trying to cure a man by making him conscious of his suppressed traumas. With one important difference: in Communist China apparently the trauma had first to be invented and then buried in the subconscious.

"I said I had nothing to confess," Chang went on. "Not because I was obstinate, mark you! Not at all, I would have been only too glad to get myself out of the corner they had forced me into, but I must admit that I have always lacked imagination, and on the spur of the moment I couldn't think of a single thing to confess. And then, I was afraid to invent something, because in our thought-reform group at the bank we had been assured that the Communists had an infallible technique for detecting lies. I just didn't dare invent anything in the

presence of that Red mandarin. I was afraid that with his numerous agents and his long experience he could penetrate into the depths of our souls. All I could do was to swear my innocence by the spirits of my forefathers. But that was wrong; it made him furious.

"'Your forefathers!' he exclaimed. 'They were all dirty bourgeois and dirty liars. How dare you appeal to them as a proof of your honesty!' I had sworn that way without thinking. It's the sort of thing I had grown up with. But this chap insisted that I ought to have sworn by the memory of Marx or Lenin; though when in a panic I did so it made him angrier than ever. 'What!' he shouted. 'You are shameless enough to debase the great leaders of Communism by calling them to witness your lies!' You know, Madame, even the most conscientious employee can no longer respect such superiors. Those same Communists were always telling us that our former English employers were rapacious blood-suckers, but we knew better; they never talked to us except courteously. I didn't know what to do or say now. I felt I would have liked the earth to open and swallow me up."

"Well, at least you can be glad your wish wasn't fulfilled. You're still alive, still young, and full of plans for the future I hope."

"Frankly, I haven't recovered sufficiently yet to have the heart to make any plans. When I first arrived here I felt as though there were no longer any marrow in my bones. But then I had the chance of a bath, and I was fed and comforted. Now I'm beginning to feel like a dried-out sponge which has been dipped in water again. I'm gradually recovering the will to live. Later on there'll be time for plans. When you've been through the terror over there you've no idea how unimportant all the troubles and trials of everyday life are when you're free again. But to go back to my experience: that Communist agent kept at me, asking question after question. I said no more than I had to, remembering our proverbial injunction: 'Never say more than a third of what you feel you'd like to say.' I was being cautious, of course, but our 'partog'—Party organiser—took it to be defiance so I was locked up in the vaults."

"In the vaults?" I repeated incredulously.

"Yes, in the bank vaults, and I was kept there for a month. In the meantime, as I learned afterwards, Communist agents went to see my mother and they told her that if she wanted to see me alive again she had better use her influence to persuade me to confess my offences. My poor mother was terribly upset. She didn't know what to think. Could her son really have . . . In any case, she sent me pleading letters begging

me to confess everything. I was in a very difficult situation now, but how could I confess things I hadn't done? I have already told you that I am not a very imaginative man, and I didn't know where to begin. At school I was always bottom of the form for free composition. It isn't an easy thing to invent crimes that hold water and conform to all the specifications of the Party. Confessions have to reveal a bourgeois mentality, noxious to the interests of the people—and it's no use inventing just anything; all the details must dovetail and stand up to examination. I tried to remember some real minor offence I had committed which I could exaggerate satisfactorily, but my mind was an absolute blank. Perhaps you can't imagine how difficult it is to remember unimportant trifles like that.

"In any case, finally I did remember that once or twice I had used the bank telephone to ring up a girl I was rather keen on at the time. That was an impropriety so I confessed it joyfully. I could see the partog wasn't very pleased with it, but he thought it over for a while. If that was the best I could do then he would have to make the most of it. Finally he said: 'So you passed on confidential information about the bank to an outside accomplice?' At that I felt a great sense of relief as though I had really brought myself at last to confess a real crime. Now perhaps the whole thing would be over I thought. No more scenes, no more relentless probings, no more wounding insults. At last they'd let me out of the vaults again. But I had counted my chickens too soon, because then he demanded to know the name of my accomplice. I flushed and told him who the girl was I had telephoned. It was the daughter of one of his Communist superiors. On hearing the name he turned quite pale and angrily declared that it was calumny, and that I had said it in order to hide far more serious things. 'I don't want to know about minor offences,' he bellowed. 'It's your real crimes I want to know about. You swear on the shades of your bourgeois ancestors that you haven't committed any crimes, but how can you expect to be believed when you go on lying all the time? What about your mother's letters? What more crying proof is there of your guilt? Would a mother plead with her son to confess his crimes unless he'd already told her about them? You can think yourself lucky that so far your affair is in the hands of the Party, and that all we require is that you should make good your crimes and pay back the money you have stolen. But, take care! If you don't confess frankly you'll be handed over to the police, and then you'll get at least five years.'"

"So you confessed?"

"No, I didn't. He had insulted my ancestors, and I wasn't going to make things easy for him. My father, and my father's father, and his father before him, were decent honest people and not bandits as he said. When I was sent back into the vaults I did something I hadn't done for a very long time. In a dark corner I set up an altar with a few ledgers, and there I knelt down and paid the proper respects to my ancestors; I hadn't done it for the past seven years. At first I had been in tears at the thought that they had forced my poor mother to betray me, but after that I felt much better, almost cheerful. I felt that somehow I had got even with the partog by honouring my ancestors. To keep my spirits up and give me strength to resist his attacks the following day, I sat on the floor that night and chanted an old Chinese proverb to myself: 'The rain never lasts the whole year; poverty doesn't last a lifetime,' and adapting it to my present circumstances: 'Brain-washing won't last a whole year; Communism won't last for ever.'"

"Well, the proverb certainly turned out right in your case."

"It did. After all, if there weren't any truth in it it wouldn't be a proverb. Anyway, the next day I was taken out of the vault, and as I continued to be 'obstinate' the kanpou handed me over to the police."

"And in their hands you continued to resist?"

"As though that were possible! I can see you don't know much about the Chinese Communist police. In their hands I was given no respite at all. I was insulted and beaten day and night. And they dragged the memory of my ancestors in the mud. In the end that no longer had any effect on me; all I was afraid of was the blows."

"Doesn't the law forbid the ill-treatment of prisoners?"

"The law? Perhaps it does, but it exists only in public speeches. In the cells there's only one law, and that's the fist. And one or two other things; for example, the red-hot iron and the thumbscrews. My case wasn't really important enough to make them go to all that trouble. All the same, after a couple of days of it my body was black and blue. Then I confessed."

"But you said you hadn't imagination enough to invent anything to confess. What *did* you finally confess?"

"That's quite right, but now the police were prepared to help me. They already have a long experience in suggesting crimes to be confessed. They are much more efficient than an ordinary partog. By means of cunning interrogations and suggestions they find out things which enable them to construct a whole rigmarole of crime which fits in very well with the background of an accused. In the end,

without having to invent anything yourself, you find that you're a thief and a class enemy and all complete with a number of supporting facts which really are facts."

"How does that come about?"

"I'm about to explain. Having cudgelled my brains I managed to remember that on one occasion I had found something wrong in one of the accounts in my charge. Now that was a fact. But then I had to say that the account in question was mine, which was false. Now on a certain day (false) a theft (true) was committed, by me (false) at the bank (true). So now we had a case for the courts, and only a slight dent in the truth. A sum of money had really disappeared, but not into my pocket. How had I spent it? On various debaucheries (false). But I had also bought myself a bicycle (true). The second fact. The shopkeeper who had sold me the bicycle (true) was there to give evidence that he had sold it to me (true), and so we had the third piece of evidence. Now, in fact, I had paid for that bicycle with money my mother had obtained from selling some jewellery which she had not declared as being in her possession. To explain that would have cast her into the tiger's maw too, so naturally I said nothing about it. In any case, it fitted nicely into my 'confession'. I had obviously bought the bicycle with part of the proceeds of my defalcation. Everything was in order now. My defalcation, expertly built up by the police and supported with snatches of truth, and the whole duly recorded under my signature, amounted to 50,000 yuan [about £6,100] and this I promised to pay back to the Communist State. I was then set free and given a fortnight in which to make restitution."

"Excuse my interrupting your highly interesting story, but tell me: who is in charge of the police in China now, the State or the Communist Party?"

"There's no difference between the two. They work together like the five fingers of a hand. Formally the police are under the Minister for Public Security, but at the Ministry there is no one but tried and trusted Communists; and in any case the Ministry itself is under the control of the Department of the Communist Party for Social Affairs. This Department also has its supervisors in the courts and in the office of the Public Prosecutor, although both of them are formally subordinate to a different Ministry. I learned all this from other prisoners who were better informed than I was, because up to then I had never bothered my head about politics."

"But despite this the police bothered their heads about you."

"They've got their noses into everything: the guarding of the frontiers, the suppression of the counter-revolution, the protection of industrial plant, depôts, bridges, the hunt for deviationists, and, above all, the private lives of ordinary citizens. It's as though every Communist policeman had a thousand eyes and a thousand arms."

"There are millions of police, I suppose?"

"No, because they are greatly assisted in their work by the so-called 'Small Groups', that is to say, the local groups to which every citizen who lives in a particular street has to belong."

"Yes, I've heard about those street groups already. Tell me how they work."

"Everyone spies on everyone else; that's the idea. Confucius told neighbours to help each other, but the Communists now tell us that such ideas are decadent and out-dated. Personally I still agree with Confucius."

"How many members have these groups on an average?"

"Ten or twenty perhaps. They mutually exhort each other to keep to the Party line."

"What goes on at the group meetings?"

"The questionnaire published by the daily newspaper on the fourth page is usually the 'discussion' theme. There is no real discussion of course; the group leader just endlessly repeats the slogans in force for the current campaign, whatever it may be. After that each member has to tell the others about his latest activities and how they fit into the subject under discussion, which he does by inserting the slogans he has just learned at whatever he considers suitable places. In the meantime the kanpou makes a careful note of all the tittle-tattle that comes out in this way—and that is the real purpose of the meetings."

"Are these meetings connected with what is called 'the reform of thought'?"

"The 'thought-reform' movement was a special campaign which occupied the Small Groups for six months and more all over China. During that period their members had to confess all their faults publicly, and tell the stories of their lives, stressing the shady sides, with the kanpous carefully writing it all down when those making the confessions could not write. In addition, the group members had to denounce all the 'reactionaries' they knew of. These 'reactionaries' were, of course, anyone they thought the authorities would like to see denounced. After that national campaign, the so-called 'thought-reform' continued to be practised steadily, but on selected individuals;

though in the event of insubordination by, say, a workshop, a factory, a hospital, or a school, it is also carried out collectively; then everyone has to suffer."

"We hear that the members of such groups have to denounce their friends and relatives at such meetings, is that true?"

"It certainly is; in fact that's the touchstone of their conversion to Communism, the practical proof that they really have broken with their old bourgeois and feudal prejudices about personal loyalty and so on. Incidentally, every Party campaign is an occasion for mass delation. Loudspeakers in the factories, offices, workshops and other places where people gather, constantly appeal to them to make denunciations. 'Have you reported everything you know?' 'Have you denounced all the offenders you know?' 'If one of your friends, or one of the members of your family, is arrested you are co-responsible for his offence unless he was arrested on your denunciation.' Thanks to this sort of thing a man learns to keep his mouth shut and do nothing, even in his own family."

"What do you mean, 'do nothing'?"

"Just what I say: do nothing beyond what he has to. No longer invite his friends to his house, no longer buy the things he'd like to buy, no longer read American thrillers, no longer listen to jazz music, no longer confide in anyone, no longer kiss anyone. . . . What else? Just do none of those things that young people do elsewhere without fear and trembling."

"No longer kiss anyone—is kissing forbidden then?"

"Well, Mao launched a campaign to reduce the birth rate, so the Party said all the boys and girls must remain chaste until they were at least twenty-two. So that's another thing in which everyone can keep an eye on everyone else, and denounce whoever doesn't obey. And in order to make sure that there shall be no misunderstanding about what a Chinese may or may not do, say or may not say, they've drawn up a list."

"A list—what sort of a list?"

"A list of defects, desirable qualities, tasks to be performed, ideologies, and so on. There are the *Three Antis*—San Fan, that is: anti-corruption, anti-waste and anti-bureaucracy. And then the *Five Other Antis*—Wu Fan: bribery, tax evasion, stealing collective property, fraud in deliveries to the State, the betrayal of economic information. There are also the *Five Loves*: love of country, love of people, love of work, love of science, love of the State. And then there are the *Three*

Scourges: bureaucracy, dogmatism and sectarianism. Then there are the *Five Principles of Peace* and the *Five Things Too Many*: too many meetings, too many tasks, too many organisations, too many officials, and too much red tape. Judges of the old régime were accused in particular of the *Four Aids*: having aided counter-revolutionaries, having aided those who broke the law by acquitting them, and two more; followed by the *Five Nots*: not having accepted the truth of the charges made by the Communist Party, not having issued summonses, etc. And, of course, I was forgetting, the *Four Pests*: flies, mosquitoes, rats and sparrows. Then there were the *Three Musts* (San Ting) for the collective farms: the quantity which each farm must produce, must sell, must buy from the State. Chou En-lai then launched the *Five Movements*, which formed, so to speak, the decimal system for all the rest. Married women have *Five Duties*: to encourage their husbands to work harder, to avoid all unnecessary expense in order that the husbands should not have to ask for wage advances, to educate their children patriotically, to keep an eye on their neighbours, and to study Communist theory. Yes, that makes five."

Each time Chang had counted them all off on his fingers at high speed, and I was unable to suppress my laughter any longer.

"You seem to know it all off by heart."

"My job has given me a good memory for figures. If that weren't so, do you think after my troubles they would have sent me on a mission to Rangoon—from where I was able to flee—unless I had apparently been totally converted or had given some solid proof of my reliability? I attended all the lectures punctually, every day I read the newspaper editorial and memorised the tasks and the key slogans of each campaign. And then, whilst we were in prison, we hardly talked about anything else. Every time a new prisoner was brought in, we asked him what he was in for. The one would say, the *Three Antis*; the other perhaps, the *Five Atmospheres*. And then we'd try to make out what it all meant."

"By the way, that's a new series, both mathematical and climatic. You haven't mentioned it before."

"The Planning Office of the metallurgical industry worked out that one. There was the bureaucratic atmosphere, the depressing atmosphere, the confessional atmosphere, the haughty atmosphere, and the bumptious atmosphere. They were publicised in the newspapers for weeks on end. And the Planning Office suggested no fewer

than fifty measures to extirpate them. At the same time the *Six Competitions* were introduced: speed, austerity, co-operation, co-ordination, diligence and ideology.¹ And then there was always an ex-member of the Party or two in prison with us to tell us about those and lots of other numbered series. For example, one of them told us that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had drawn up *eight categories* in which it placed visitors from abroad: heads of State, heads of important missions, important members of such missions, ordinary members and so on. Only the first three categories were entitled to be received with bunches of flowers at the airports. If you ever go to China and no one hands you a bouquet you'll know it's because you're not in any of the first three categories."

"I shan't mind that provided they don't attempt to teach me to re-think."

"In the primary schools teachers had to work according to the *Five Links*: organisation, revision, teaching, consolidation and organisational preparation. Then all Chinese families are divided into *three grades*: progressive, backward and impenitent. And then there are the *Five Class Struggles*, the *Three Tactical Phases*, the *Four Classes of Counter-Revolutionary Peasants*, the *Seven Kinds of Counter-Revolutionary Intellectuals*, and the *Eight Fears*."

"And what's really the point of all these classifications? They sound very confusing to me."

"They allow the Communists to ticket and docket everybody and everything, revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, rich or poor, intellectual or manual worker. Everyone has his number in this or that group, or sub-group, or sub-sub-group. They have invented so many categories and sub-categories that they have to give everybody his classification in order not to get mixed up."

"It sounds appalling. But tell me, how do ordinary people take all this?"

"You get used to it as you get used to everything: the droughts, the floods, and all the other scourges. Classification, that's our new-style opium. No one can do without it. No one, not even those who are actively against it all. Those who were taken in by the 'Hundred Flowers' for example, and were imprudent enough to express their views. . . . Well, even they had been so imbued with classifications that they classified their griefs in numbered series. For example, the well-known writer Hu Feng denounced the *Five Daggers* implanted in

¹ I subsequently found them all in the *People's Daily* of March 9, 1958.

the heart of the intellectuals. As I had a trained mind myself, I memorised them all easily, particularly as, for once, it gave me pleasure to number them all off: Marxism, labourism, politics, re-thinking, official style."

"It sounds like a sort of throw-back to ancient mandarinism, which, as you well know, classified ancient Chinese wisdom by ordinal numbers: the Three Reasons, the Four Motives, the Five Effects, the Two Principles Yin and Yang."

"No doubt you are right. I must confess that I'm not a classical scholar; but this I do know: the old mandarins may have numbered their ideas too, but it didn't imply deportation or brain-washing for other people."

"One more question: you said that there were always at least one or two ex-members of the Communist Party in prison with you. How did they get there?"

"Well, you see, the Communist Party also goes through its rectification campaigns, and then those members who are denounced as 'right-wingers', 'left-wingers', 'revisionists', or what have you, according to circumstances, are expelled from the Party and often put into prison. There's an old Chinese saying that it's easier to cage a tiger than to keep it on a lead, you know. On June 5, 1953—I remember the date so precisely because it happens to be my birthday—the so-called supervising correspondents were created, and their special task was to spy on the other members of the Party. You can imagine the delight of the rest of us when one of this privileged class found himself in gaol with us!"

"Yes, I certainly can. The sheep are always glad when the wolves take to devouring each other."

"Out of common decency they wouldn't say too much to him, particularly as he was usually in a dreadful state; but they would exchange eloquent glances. We have another proverb which says that when a rich man suddenly becomes poor he's far worse off than a man who's been poor all his life. And when a Communist falls into disgrace he really is down and out. He hasn't a friend in the world. All his former friends either avoid him or eagerly give him another kick."

"I suppose to find a Communist in prison is very exceptional?"

"Not all that much. The Central Committee discovers so many deviationists that it has formed a special Control Commission to combat—I'm quoting from the newspapers—'the subversive activities and the unhealthy tendencies amongst members of the Party'. None

other than Tung Fi-wu, President of the Supreme Court, was appointed to head this commission of controllers of our ordinary controllers. That's laughable, of course, because as one of my fellow prisoners pointed out the defects complained of are solely due to the Party itself. And then they try to combat them with people even more devoted to the Party! It's as though you set out to curb the pickpockets through the cracksmen."

"By the way, did you manage to get hold of the very large sum of money they claimed from you as restitution?"

"My mother had no savings at all. All she possessed was the pleasant house we lived in, together with my four brothers. Our father had left it to her. She now tried to sell it. But who's going to buy a house at a time when everyone who possesses anything is quite sure to have it taken away from him sooner or later? In the end the Communist municipality agreed to buy it—at about a third its value. It was just enough, deliberately, to meet my obligations. After that we moved our *khan* into two dismal rooms the municipality let to us and which it had laid its hands on by the same procedure. That, by the way, is how the State gets hold of the property of small people, not only in our town but throughout the country. At first the Communists assured everyone that all they were interested in was the factories, the machinery and so on, by means of which employers and capitalists exploited the people; houses, shops, land and so on by which no one was exploited were to be left untouched. Well, that, I can tell you, turned out to be another lie. In China the Communists have stolen everything. We have a proverb which says: 'Neither a general nor a minister is made of any different clay.' In prison we used to adapt that proverb, as we adapted many others: 'Neither a Communist nor a Capitalist is made of any different clay. Their property is robbery.' "

"So you've heard of that famous aphorism of Proudhon?"

"No. Who is Proudhon?"

"He was a French socialist theoretician who lived during the last century and coined the famous phrase 'Property is robbery'."

"In our Small Group we were told that Stalin coined it."

"Let that pass. You mentioned something called a '*khan*' just now, What's that exactly?"

"A Chinese bed. It looks something like a divan, but it's made of tiles and covered with a waxed board and a piece of matting. It is hollow and in winter it can be used as a stove. Very well; we shifted our *khan* into one of the two gloomy, damp rooms, which had neither

running water nor electric light. My poor mother soon began to suffer terribly from rheumatism, and very shortly afterwards she died."

"When she fell ill, did she have to stay in that damp place? Couldn't she have been taken to hospital?"

"Places in good hospitals are reserved for Communists and their families. Before you've got a chance of a bed you must have killed at least six counter-revolutionaries. As for the ordinary hospitals, they're as bad as ever they were in the past, and the patients are not looked after even as well as they were before, because the doctors have to do their Stakhanovist stints as well as their ordinary work. But in keeping our poor mother at home in that place we were not able to look after her properly, though we did our best. And the only medicaments you can get in the pharmacies, which are, of course, all nationalised, are wretched."

"But if they're nationalised I suppose their medicines are at least free?"

"You suppose wrong! We have to pay for everything, and it's not even good; at least, the stuff they produce in our nationalised laboratories isn't. If you can get hold of imported medicines they're all right, but you can't; they're practically unobtainable. And if they are on sale the price is far beyond an ordinary Chinese purse."

I made a point of verifying that detail in my conversations with other Chinese refugees.

"And as for the partog who had started all the trouble in the first place, he moved with his family into our old house."

"Openly? Weren't the people in the neighbourhood shocked?"

"Perhaps they were. But even if they were, who would have dared to make any comment, much less to protest? You seem to forget that I had been branded as a counter-revolutionary, and the least that could happen to me then was to be turned out of my house and lose my job."

"How does a man live in such circumstances?"

"The solution is quite simple. You 'volunteer' to go off with the labour armies embanking the rivers, clearing the forests or building roads in Tibet. That's the system the Emperor Shih Huang To adopted two thousand years ago to build the Great Wall. In numerous ways he brought about the ruin of many thousands of people, and when they no longer knew which way to turn he sent out his recruiting agents and enrolled them in his slave armies."

"And did you join one of the 'Great Wall' undertakings of the new 'Emperors' Mao and Chou then?"

"No, I didn't have to—thanks to one of those sudden reversals of fortune which are typical of all Communist régimes. At a moment when, after the death of my mother, I was not only in despair but in desperate material need too, something happened to save me. It was the unexpectedly launched movement known as 'the reform of the reformers'."

"What on earth was that?"

"I'll tell you in a minute, but first of all let me make it quite clear that I was far from being an exception: large numbers of ordinary people like myself suffered the same fate. Naturally, all those arbitrary extortions, both brutal and perfidious, engendered a good deal of smouldering hatred. In our town there weren't many families who hadn't lost at least one of their members as a result of those terrible machinations; and as very often four generations live under the same roof the misfortune of one is felt intimately by many more people. The population was shocked at the turn events had taken. People were so frightened that when, during one of the campaigns of rectification, the Secretary of the Party Committee in Dairen, Liu Kwei-jen, delivered a furious diatribe against conditions in a certain factory in the neighbourhood, its chief engineer promptly committed suicide. Being aware that anger was steadily rising on all sides, the leaders, who were really responsible, started to put the blame on their subordinates and make them scapegoats for the popular anger. In fact, however, not one of those subordinates charged with carrying out the orders from above would have dared on his own initiative to commit all those brutalities which so inflamed the general public. All they had done, and all they had to do, was to carry out the orders of their superiors. But in order to appease the general anger, the latter accused their subordinates of having condemned innocent people, of having acted on malicious denunciations, and of having used physical torture to extract confessions."

"You mean that the Communists publicly admitted that that sort of thing had been going on?"

"Certainly, you can read it in their newspapers. For example, the Secretary of the Party Committee wrote that at both Dairen and Port Arthur at least twenty per cent. of those who had been arrested during the campaign for the suppression of the counter-revolution should never have been arrested at all, and that of the sixty-five per cent. who had been condemned in the previous few months ten per cent. were condemned without just cause. He also declared that the methods

employed to convict them—insults, threats and blows—were in violation of the directives of the Party.”

“You mean that the Communist newspapers publicly admitted things which it would have cost any man’s life to have mentioned only a week or so previously?”

“Yes, I do. One of our sages once said: ‘There may be a thousand ways, but there is only one logic.’ Thus the Communists may take a thousand ways, but their one logic always leads to the same place—prison. Their steam-roller must always crush someone or other; one day it is the ordinary citizen, the next day it may be the turn of the Party official. Very well, this movement for the reform of the reformers started shortly before the end of my process, when I was still in prison. With the result that I had the pleasure of welcoming some of those oppressive officials who had in the meantime been tipped off their pedestals. And their attitude was very different, I can tell you: all the stuffing had been knocked out of them. From proud executioners they had become scared crawlers. But even reduced to our ranks, they still inspired suspicion. As another of our proverbs says: ‘It is easier to see the tiger’s skin than his bones.’ Certainly the look on their faces was different, but had there been any change of heart?”

“In any case, you were fortunate to emerge from your prison relatively unscathed, so let’s get on with what happened to you when you benefited from the campaign for the reform of the reformers.”

“Very well. One fine day I received a document informing me that my case had been ‘reviewed’ and that in consequence my innocence had been established. It was just as much a bolt from the blue as the original circular which had led to all the trouble. The next day I was called to the bank and given my old job back. I had to borrow decent clothes to go in, because by this time my own were in rags. A general thaw now took place all around me. My brothers were able to hold up their heads again, and those old friends who had avoided us began to seek our company again. My brothers were loud in their praise of Mao, and unloaded all their anger on his wretched subordinate who had stolen our house. In fact they pursued the matter so actively that in the end we were paid compensation for our loss.”

“Compensation, eh? That at least was decent.”

“In money though; we didn’t get the house back; and in the meantime prices had risen so high that all we could do was buy ourselves a little furniture, some clothing and bicycles. However, we didn’t bother much about that. The house would have been miserable for us

without our mother anyway. The saddest thing for me was that she was in her grave and would never know that her son had been rehabilitated and was no longer publicly regarded as a thief. Although she never even hinted it to me, I always felt that she had had her doubts, and that hurt me. And, above all, I had now lost all faith in our country's leaders. The volte-face of our neighbours, who were now as friendly as they had previously been hostile, showed me that you couldn't rely on anyone any more, and that the people around you weren't living human beings any more, but just shadows carrying out the orders of the Central Committee—which could change from one day to the next so that no one could foresee what was going to happen in the future. There was no reason why one day the Central Committee shouldn't launch a campaign to reform the reformers of the previous reformers, which would mean that the criminals of yesterday, declared innocent today, would again be criminals tomorrow. Don't think that impossible; it had already happened in the past.

"And then, the girl I had been keen on had denounced me as an enemy of the people whilst I was in prison, and had, in the meantime, married an official who was still in place. Forgive me if I quote you another of our proverbs: 'Nothing is more difficult than to find a friend when you are poor, unless it is to find a wife when you are in disgrace.' Because of all these things I was no longer happy in my own country. Shortly afterwards I was fortunate enough to be chosen to go with a banking delegation to Burma. Once arrived in Rangoon I chose freedom, and I went off secretly to Hongkong. I hope that a better future will open up to me here. At least I can live again as a human being."

THE STUDENT PING

I NOW went to the Assistance Committee Centre for refugee intellectuals, which was in Kowloon. I was received amiably by the young American in charge, Mr. Ward Smith, and I made him the same request as I made everywhere: "Can you put me in touch with refugees recently arrived from China?"

Having assured himself by a few discreet questions that I was not a spy or a Communist, but a French writer, as I said, he informed me that he had two refugees who spoke French. "I'll have them fetched for you."

Two thin young men arrived shortly afterwards, but one of them, the older of the two, spoke very little French, and certainly not enough for my purposes. The other was a former officer of Chiang Kai-shek's army. He spoke good French in a very hoarse voice which was a legacy of terrible tortures he had suffered at the hands of Mao's police, who had tried to make him confess that he was "an American spy". As he had been an officer of the Kuomintang and might therefore be accused of partisanship I have not recorded his story here, compelling though it was.

Before taking leave of Mr. Smith, who, from my conversation with him, seemed well informed about military matters, I asked him something which had been in my mind since the very first day I had set foot on "the perfumed isle", namely: "Why don't the Communists seize Hongkong? Everywhere I have been assured that the British Government couldn't defend the place for twenty-four hours against a serious attack. Is that true?"

"It is true that the geographical nature of the island, with its mountain peaks and its abrupt rocks, would make it impossible to use planes to defend it; and if Mao hasn't seized the place, it is because he doesn't want to. But that it certainly isn't because he is afraid of falling out with the British. Remember that he has already been at war with them once, because they provided a contingent for the United Nations

forces in Korea. No, the fact is that if he seized Hongkong the wealth and value of the port would decline immediately, just as it did at once when the Japanese occupied it, and just as Shanghai and Canton have done under Communist domination. No, Mao would gain nothing by seizing Hongkong, and, on the other hand, he would lose a marvellous listening post and a basis of operations extending into the free world. Hongkong is the most convenient channel for the trade in gold, narcotics and strategic materials; and all the espionage and counter-espionage centres of Asia are situated here. The Central Committee can use Hongkong most conveniently both to send out and to receive information, rumours, and so on. . . . That is why Peking is prepared to tolerate the continued presence of the British in Hongkong."

The next day Mr. Smith telephoned me to say that he could now put me in touch with a student who had left Peking only a few weeks ago, and suggesting that I should invite the young man to lunch. We made our arrangements and I found that this young man, whom I will call Ping, spoke excellent French. In addition, he was wide awake, sensible and intelligent; so much so that almost immediately he made me forget that we belonged to two such different races and civilisations, and soon I felt nothing for him but the sympathy one feels for any human being who has suffered misfortune. In fact his misfortunes were not at an end, and he was still obviously suffering from them. For one thing he had had to leave his young wife and his two children behind in China, which meant that they were dead to him for ever. And being now amidst so many happy mothers and children made him feel lonelier than ever. He was sad and forgotten; one individual victim who had managed to escape from the vast storm of intolerance which had swept over his country. Now and again he would interrupt his story, apropos of nothing, to exclaim: "I don't want to return to China, ever!" It was almost as though someone—the British authorities—or something—the memory of his family—was lying in wait to force him back. Here is his story:

While studying he had found work as a librarian, and he managed to earn enough to keep his small family. It was thus not poverty, but oppression, which had forced him to flee. He was not hungry, but frightened.

"Whatever we did or said was watched and noted down, to be used against us perhaps years later. For example, one day I happened to say of something or other: 'This American brand is better than the

Chinese.' Twenty-six months later, during the course of an interrogation, it was thrown up at me, and the circumstances and the names of those present were mentioned. If I happened to miss a meeting because I had too much work to do, I was treated as a counter-revolutionary. If I pleaded that I was unwell, some Party official would come to my room to make sure that I was not up and about. In the end, and in order to avoid trouble, I submitted blindly to everything. I went where I was told to go at the time I was told. And I never went anywhere I was told not to go. I had become a robot. I had lost my human dignity. All I was still conscious of was that gnawing sense of humiliation in my vitals.

"But it wasn't sufficient to obey silently as a lackey obeys; we had to obey volubly as an obsequious beggar obeys. We were constantly bombarded with questionnaires, and we had to fill them up in accordance with the Party Line and return them. The Party Line! You dared not deviate from it by a hair's breath. And yet it was impossible to know just exactly what it was at any given moment. For example, on one of those questionnaires we were asked, among other things, why the Dalai Lama in Tibet had done well to accept the protection of the Communist power. I replied: 'Because the Communist power protects all beliefs in so far as they are not harmful to the people.' One evening the Political Commissar at the university summoned me to inform me that what I should have written was: 'Because the Communist power frees all beliefs from their subjection to Capitalism.' It was one of those terrible questionnaires which brought me disaster. It contained twenty-two questions aimed at finding out what we thought about the latest 'anti-imperialist movement' launched by the Party. Driven to distraction, I was incautious enough to reply that I didn't think anything at all. That did it! I was immediately submitted to a series of 'mental bombardments'. The first bombardments were intended to show me what I ought to have thought, and therefore written down on the questionnaire. The second lot were intended to discover whether I had understood anything at all of the things they had shot into me."

"This term 'mental or moral bombardment' seems a stock phrase in China today. I keep hearing it. Tell me about it."

"'Mental bombardment' is the name for a series of interrogations and prepared conversations lasting for hours, usually at night, and going on for perhaps a fortnight. In between these 'active' sessions the victim is kept in isolation and compelled to read theoretical, so to

speech, doctrinal texts or to write his *mea culpa*. Everything is put under the magnifying glass, your least word, your intonation, your commas and full stops. They can harass you for hours over one adjective. And often the examiners are threatening and insulting, in order to soften you up."

"I suppose it's what we call 'brain-washing' in Europe?"

"No. Brain-washing is an even more intense operation which comes in the category of mental torture. It is usually confined to people held in prisons, people who are regarded, for some reason or other, as important: former Party leaders, missionaries, and writers whose words could serve the Party once they have been sufficiently softened up. It can last much longer than ordinary 'mental bombardment', sometimes for years on end. It also includes more rigorous treatment: handcuffs, chains, blows, emotional pressure from those who are near and dear to you, interrogations one following the other without let up for days and nights at a time until the victim goes almost mad from lack of rest and sleep. Fortunately I was not regarded as sufficiently important for this, as you might say, 'de-luxe' treatment. Brain-washing, as I have said, is usually confined to prisons, where it is 'made to measure', so to speak; but it can also be used in public, in universities, in villages and at meetings, and then it is used *en masse*."

"Is that when the term 're-thinking' is appropriate?"

"Yes. It's really another form of brain-washing, but it doesn't include physical maltreatment and it can be carried out, so to speak, on a moving band. The Communists say that a man should wash his brains just as he washes his face; and in order to assist in the operation, they organise special 'thought-reform' sessions at which the job is carried out collectively. For example, at the university, we were treated every week to an eight-hour session of thought-reform. And that was in addition to the obligatory lectures on Marxist-Leninism and the history of the revolution. The avowed idea of those lectures was to assist the students to abandon all the old bourgeois ideas they had acquired in childhood; and also—I quote from the Communist press—"to restore a proper sense of humility in those working-class students who have become bourgeois by attending universities".

"In our Western universities it's the other way round: our young undergraduates are apt to strike revolutionary poses."

Ping was inclined to be reticent with regard to his own experiences and I had to encourage him repeatedly: "So in the end you filled up the circular in accordance with the desires of the Communist Party?"

"After six days of 'mental bombardment' I wasn't completely softened up. The questionnaire was presented to me again to be filled up, and once again—I'm not sure what came over me: defiance, stupidity, or a last desperate convulsion of human dignity?—I still wrote that I didn't think anything about it at all. After that they took to coming for me in the middle of the night and dragging me off to prison, where I was put in a cell and kept there for three days at a time, and forced to learn by heart a text they gave me, after which I had to recite it, and if I made a mistake I was clouted. At one moment they seemed to have come to the conclusion that I was just a simpleton, and I was made to learn by heart a list of the crimes of capitalist imperialism, but at another they accused me of being an accomplice of that imperialism and threatened me with the gallows. On one occasion I was told to write to my wife to tell her to bring me winter clothing—which meant that I was to be sent away to a concentration camp. Then the letter was torn up before my eyes in order to persuade me of the infinite benevolence of the Communist régime."

At this point Ping's voice broke and he had to make an effort not to burst into sobs. I showed great interest in an ornament on the wall, in order to give him time to pull himself together.

"When I returned home in the morning, exhausted and sucked dry, there was the look of distress on my wife's face to suffer, and it was difficult to tell which emotion was uppermost in her: pity, suffering or reproach. I shall never forget that look no matter how long I live. It was enough to make me surrender. And in any case, no father of a family in China can afford the luxury of personal pride and independence. I spent the whole night carefully filling out the questionnaire with the answers I had learnt by heart, and I did it in order that my children should be able to go on eating. As a punishment for my offence, I was now sent to Coventry for six months. No one spoke to me and I was not allowed to speak to anyone else outside the house."

He noticed that this astonished me and made me wonder whether he was exaggerating.

"No, I'm not exaggerating," he said. "I was forbidden to exchange a single word with anyone apart from my wife and children for six months on end. Let me tell you that to spend six months with your normal companions at work and elsewhere and not to be able to exchange a single word with them is one of the most terrible and perverse tortures you can possibly imagine. At the library, my fellow students would hand me the lists of books they required—and look

the other way. Then I was deprived of my post as librarian and put in an attic to do copying. I began to feel like a leper with his bell, and after a while I thought I should go mad."

I could well understand that, and I was horrified at the thought that in our own day a government ruling over six hundred million human beings arrogated to itself the right to determine to whom each one of them might talk or not talk. Even the pain of excommunication with bell, book and candle in the Middle Ages did not go that far.

"But in fact the heaviest blow the Party struck at me, the one which it thought would surely break me for good and all, turned out to be the thing which liberated me. By a series of measures which I won't describe in detail, the Party succeeded in turning my wife against me. She was not only subjected to moral pressure and made to undergo physical privations, but they threatened to withdraw the children's rations. Then her parents began to influence her by a mixture of pleading and political calumny. When she returned to our home after visiting them, it was now my turn to look at her with a mixture of pity and reproach. She avoided my eyes and she wept frequently. Then, one night, she told me that she was going back to her parents and taking the children with her. She assured me that nothing had changed between us but that in the circumstances it was best that she should go.

"Whether it was the best thing to do or not I shall never know, but at least it was the only thing to do since the Party had decided that it should be so. I embraced her without saying a word, and after collecting a few things together, I took one last look at our sleeping children, and then I left. When I was outside I realized that I need not have taken anything with me at all because there was obviously only one way out left to me, and that was suicide. And it was then, at the very bottom of the pit, that the gleam of hope appeared. Was it fear of death that moved me, or the need to live in order to give vent to the revolt that convulsed me? One way or the other, I abandoned the idea of suicide and instead I decided to flee, particularly as now that she had done the Party's bidding my wife would have nothing to fear. I had enough money to get to Canton by train, and an old authorisation permitting me to go there for a conference of librarians."

"You needed an authorisation to travel?"

"To be more exact, you needed an authorisation to stay anywhere but in your own house even for a night. Mine was dated the previous year, but, nothing venture, nothing have, and so I altered the date. It

was a strange thing, but from the moment I decided to make my escape, the humiliations I had undergone didn't seem to matter any more; and my determination to fight for my life against the jack-boot that threatened to crush me gave me strength and courage. I had recovered the gown of dignity, and I changed the date on my permit without trepidation."

Even when speaking in French, Ping still used the imagery characteristic of Chinese thought. Whilst the Hindus, a spiritualised people *par excellence*, juggle with ethereal abstractions in prosaic language, the Chinese speak of prosaic things in a flowery and poetic language; which seems to prove that poetry arises more from the material world than from philosophical involutions.

"I made my way to Canton, therefore," Ping went on, "and from there, travelling only at night and hiding during the day, I managed to get within reach of Hongkong territory. After that, if you haven't the use of a boat, the only way is to start from a point a little way from the frontier where the surveillance is not so strict, and to make your way along the coast at night, partly by swimming and partly over the rocks, until you get opposite British territory, and then you must swim the rest. Above all, in this way you manage to avoid the attentions of the Chinese police dogs, which can follow scent only on dry land. The thing takes three nights. During the day there are plenty of nooks and crannies in which you can hide. The most difficult part is to get hold of non-perishable food, such as biscuits, chocolate and tinned food, which is a rarity in China. But with my last remaining money I managed to buy a little such food from soldiers at a railway station who were setting off on manoeuvres. It is perhaps to that chance encounter that I owe my life and liberty."

I congratulated him on his energy and courage, and I could see him positively preen himself at my words; not out of vanity, but simply because someone had shown an interest in his fate. He had now told me the most tragic and shattering happenings of his personal experience, those which were indelibly imprinted on his mind. As far as I was concerned, like any Westerner who is not determined to close both eyes and ears, I had heard a good deal about the terror in Communist China, and now I rather wanted to take advantage of the opportunity which had put me in touch with an intelligent man who spoke my own language excellently, and who had himself witnessed and experienced the development of Communism, to inquire into one or two matters of more general interest.

"The thought-reform you spoke of—did the whole thing arise out of the caprice of some subordinate official, or was it a deliberate decision of the Communist centre?"

"The Communist terror is something quite different from the often anarchical and spontaneous terror which has accompanied other revolutions and uprisings in our history. It almost gives you the impression that death and fear are distributed by the Party according to some prearranged plan, as it rations rice and cotton. In any case, what subordinate bureaucrat or Party official would dare to take the slightest initiative under such a totalitarian régime as the Communist, even if it were only aimed at making the terror more efficient? No, the terror proceeds always from the Political Bureau of the Communist Party itself. If a dozen students are subjected to brain-washing in some university far away, say in Tibet, it is always as the result of some inhuman plan concocted in Peking.

"And if there is brain-washing for a certain social category in Tibet, then at the same time the same category is subjected to it in Jehol too, for our bureaucrats and planners love uniformity. Every cell in the great body of China simultaneously feels the same icy tremor which freezes the blood. You see, our terror is a mass terror, just as we have mass meetings, mass conversions, mass refectories and mass deportations. There is no individual terrorism in China, no settlement of private accounts as the result of private disputes as there was sometimes during our civil war and at the time of the French Resistance movement. There is only the terror wielded by the State, which is anonymous, institutional, inhuman and automatised on the moving-band principle. That is the second characteristic of our terror.

"A third characteristic is that it always decks itself out in the hypocritical garb of legality. The arrest itself is certainly arbitrary and unforeseeable, and it comes like a bolt from the blue on people who have not the slightest idea of their crime. But after that they themselves have to fill the gap and to invent their own crimes. And please don't suppose that the police are prepared to accept any sort of confession by a harassed innocent anxious only to get it over. Oh no, the victim has to invent something which will hold water, something which hangs together and is based on proper proofs, so that the case against him makes a coherent whole in precisely the pedantic fashion which is demanded by the régime."

"I have already realised myself that the Chinese terror is a slavish copy of the Soviet terror," I put in. "One has only to read *The*

Conspiracy of Silence by Alexander Weissberg to see that. The resemblance is fantastic."

"Here in Hongkong there is a former Soviet councillor and a German merchant, both of whom fled from the terror in their own countries. From my talks with them and from my own experience I succeeded in discovering the essential differences between the three terrors. In Nazi Germany the torturers were quite happy to torture their victims without bothering in the least whether they were guilty or not. In the Soviet Union, where they proceed on the assumption that the GPU never makes a mistake, the victim is necessarily guilty, and in consequence he has to be made to admit it and sign the appropriate confession. After that he is sometimes given the privilege of a public trial, though usually he is just deported or liquidated out of hand, and the police then pass on to the next job. But in China, which normally just copies the Soviet Union, a new and special horror has been added: namely, when the innocent has thoroughly covered himself with odium and signed the blackest confession, the nightmare really begins.

"And that is because it is now considered necessary to persuade the guilty innocent that he has committed real crimes, to persuade him to eliminate the perverse bourgeois mentality he has inherited, from his vitals for ever, and to persuade him to feel gratitude towards the Communist régime which has taken the trouble to save him. Perhaps you can understand now how it is that people go mad under the Chinese terror."

"At least the French politician Daniel Mayer assures us that you do not suffer physical torture as the victims of the Nazis did."

"That just isn't true. There is torture from the most barbarous to the most refined. Let me remind you of the findings of the international commission on concentration camps whose president happened to be a Frenchman. . . ."

"Yes, I know. David Rousset. The commission published a so-called White Book on Chinese concentration camps. And subsequently the authenticity of the evidence it collected was recognised by an international court."

"That commission found, for example, that accused persons were made to eat human excrement. I know that this is true because one of the victims told me about it. I can also tell you that prisoners have been buried alive, and that to tear out the nails of prisoners is quite a common practice. I myself saw the traces of that torture on the fingers

of an unfortunate who was being dragged along the corridor of the building in which I was subjected to my 'mental bombardment'. As a matter of fact I have an idea that the thing was deliberately staged in order for me to see it—as a warning of what might happen to me if I remained obstinate."

I was not sorry to get away from that grisly subject, which, I could see, was upsetting Ping—and me too I must admit. We now returned to the question of higher education.

"We are told by Mao's friends abroad that under Communism in China all talented young people can go to universities, whereas in the days of the Kuomintang the sons of peasants were, for all practical purposes, excluded. Has there in fact been progress in that respect under Communism?"

"It is quite true that before the revolution it was chiefly the sons of bourgeois and of merchants who attended the universities. However, in the case of a talented youth of poor family—for example, one of my cousins—there were scholarships; and then the missionaries were helpful too. However, if you believe that, because there has been a change since the revolution, there is now no educational class distinction, you are very much mistaken. First of all the Communists just threw out all those young men who were at the universities when they came to power; that is to say, the sons of the bourgeoisie and merchants. Those young men were not responsible for the social origin of their fathers. Was it any more right to make them suffer because of the injustices done to poor students in the past? They were innocent too. As far as I am concerned I thought the aim of Communism was not to transfer the privileges of one class to another, but to eliminate all privileges and all classes."

"And what was the result of that sad demagoguery as far as the quality of the studies was concerned?"

"Nothing short of disastrous. In order to fill the gap caused by the proscription of the sons of the upper and middle classes, who were the only ones with the necessary preliminary training to take advantage of higher education, the universities hurriedly recruited the sons of workers and peasants who had not previously enjoyed any secondary education. The level of education sank so much that most Chinese families outside China who would otherwise have sent their sons to Chinese universities ceased to do so once the universities got into Mao's hands. I can tell you about one case in particular. The Communist press made a tremendous to-do about it: a former rickshaw

coolie had passed out top at the university. They published his photograph and gave the whole affair big headlines, all with a view to showing the glory of the new régime and what it did for people who had previously been illiterate. In two years this man had got his degree with first-class honours in every subject. Perhaps this ridiculous ballyhoo deceived some people; it certainly didn't deceive the other undergraduates, who knew perfectly well what had happened: the professors had been given a broad hint as to the demagogic intentions of the Party with this man, and prudently they saw to it that he got top marks in every subject. Laughable, of course, but also pitiful. You may find me over-sensitive, but as a member of the Party I felt ashamed. I was quite prepared for a strict régime, but I thought it would at least be just and rational. Instead of that they presented us with such shabby tricks. But that isn't the way to build up a new world. And as a Chinese patriot, I was alarmed at the deterioration brought about in the educational standards of my country by such policies."

"But weren't such things perhaps the typical excesses that invariably accompany the first stage of any revolution?"

"No doubt they were, but even afterwards one particular policy was systematically pursued as a matter of principle, namely the restriction of higher education to the children of the bureaucrats. As I remained the librarian of the university until the end of my studies I saw the whole development at close hand."

"So," I said, "the form of inheritance instituted by what Djilas calls 'the new Communist class' is the privilege of higher education? After all, it's quite logical. As the new class is characterised by the power to control and not by the possession of property, it is only normal that inheritance should consist not of wealth but of the means with which to exercise control, one of which is a university education."

"True, but it only remains to add that the inheritance of property has not thereby been abolished. Those who exercise control also enjoy considerable material advantages and they do not fail to pass them on to their children. I haven't had a chance of reading Djilas on the point, but I've heard his book spoken of. No one who has not lived in China can understand just how right he is. Today in our country the Communist leaders determine the social class to which each individual belongs all his life, and there is no appeal. Once they have passed through the elementary school the vast majority of pupils end their studies and become the 'soldiers' of society; that is to say, workers or peasants; and they remain workers or peasants all their lives. There is

no chance whatever of their ever becoming anything else. A few millions do take a further three years of secondary education. These privileged ones are to be the non-commissioned officers, so to speak, of the régime: foremen, secretaries of co-operatives, and minor officials generally. A further few millions have three years of continuation training. These are the subaltern officers, the cadres. Then a few hundred thousand, consisting almost exclusively, and with a few very rare exceptions, of the children of the higher bureaucrats, are admitted to the universities. It is from their ranks that the really privileged caste of officers comes. These are the real bureaucrats as a class. And then, from amongst these there is a super-selection of perhaps 3,000 highly privileged every year who are sent to the Soviet Union to conclude their studies. This selection is made annually after a very detailed examination and a close inquiry into their character, loyalty to the régime, and so on. These men form the top leading cadres, the really prominent leaders of the régime, the heads of the privileged class."

"What is it that determines the level of studies to which each individual is admitted; that is to say, the position in the hierarchy which each individual has the right to occupy?"

"Officially, it is the social status he occupies from the start, just as it was in the days of the mandarins. In practice it is a class matter—peasant or bureaucrat—the influence of his parents, and so on, just as it always was."

"But tell me, isn't it true to say that the rise to a privileged position as the result of marks given in competitive examinations does nevertheless introduce some sort of justice within the framework of those unjust social discriminations which no régime, Communist or otherwise, seems entirely able to avoid?"

"It is true that one is instinctively inclined to suppose that the selection in a Communist régime is 'by merit'; i.e., through examinations and points. We Chinese in particular have every reason to know the defects of such a system, since it imposed our famous caste of mandarins on us; they were certainly highly educated men, and generally speaking upright and humane, but at the same time their caste was quite hide-bound. The marks awarded in competitive examinations refer exclusively to the intellectual aspect of the very many qualities a good leader must possess; and they are given only at one phase in the life of an individual, namely adolescence, whereas human beings develop considerably on reaching adulthood. Nevertheless, the system of classification according to the results of study could provide

one factor towards a solution of the problem, always assuming that the studies themselves were suitable and the award fair. But under the Communist system the decisive marks are not awarded for technical, scientific or literary work, but for the ability to mouth political rigmarole.

"Whatever course of studies is being followed, many hours per week are devoted to cramming the minds of the students with that new scholastic hotchpotch which goes under the name of 'Marxist-Leninism', or 'dialectical materialism'. I wish you could see for yourself the inferior position occupied in Chinese universities by those professors who teach the subjects of real importance for human knowledge, compared with the so-called professors of politics, who strut around full of self-importance, smugness and power, although in reality they are more pedants and spies than professors. It is the judgments of these people which are decisive for the future career of a student, not his achievements in the sphere of real knowledge. In other words, the Communist system perpetuates the worst fault of the old mandarin system, which was not so much that it awarded places according to the marks obtained in the examinations, but that it attached overriding importance to the least practically useful subject; namely, a knowledge of Confucian classics. All the Communist system has done is to replace the Confucian classics by Marxist classics, with the aggravating feature that whereas under the mandarins it was the authentic Confucius that was taught, under the Communists it is a falsified and distorted Marx.

"And then, the awarding of the examination marks is grossly partial, and, in fact, the status of the parents is of far more importance today than ever it was in the past. Do you think that any examiner would dare to give low marks to the son of an important Party secretary, or to the son of a police chief? To do so would be more than his career—even more than his life—was worth, because his own existence depends on the marks those people give him in his administrative dossier. Conversely, no examiner would dare to give high marks to the son of a purged father, or to the son of someone who in some other way had fallen into political disfavour—if by any chance their sons had happened to remain at the university. To sum up: in the hands of the Communists, the system of classification by marks awarded at examinations has developed into part and parcel of the mechanism of oppression."

"What is the future career of those students who are privileged to

receive secondary education but who are not allowed to go to the universities?"

"Generally speaking, they become subordinate bureaucrats if the reason for their not continuing their studies is lack of talent. But if they get poor marks in political subjects they will end up as labourers. If you read the Chinese newspapers you will constantly find complaints about the number of these secondary-school youths who, having been sent to work in the fields—because they have not made the political grade—flee the country."

"What subjects do these political courses deal with, and how long do they last?"

"In all schools and institutions of learning, and at all grades, the students have to study and re-study 'the basis of Marxist-Leninism', 'dialectical materialism', 'historic materialism', and the 'history of the Communist Party of China'. Towards the end of 1956, the amount of time devoted to these political courses was reduced to 102 hours per term. This alleviation was decided on because the burden of these political studies had clearly become too great for students to bear—as well as being practically useless to them. Because after each such course, in which the 'pile-drivers', as we used to call them, have rammed and hammered home their stodgy ideological pabulum, all students do their utmost to relieve their minds of it as quickly as possible. In October 1955 an extended investigation covering 256 students who had gone through these political courses revealed the fact that only four of them were able to reply accurately to quite simple questions concerning the orthodox ideology hammered into them by these 'pile-drivers' for the previous five years. For example, one of the questions was to discover if they could say 'what was the most important socialist measure which had been carried out within the framework of the Five-Year Plan on the food front'. They were supposed to answer that it was the abolition of the distributive middleman, but almost all of them said that it was the introduction of ration cards. You can confirm this in the *Chung Kuo Ching Nien Pao* of November 5, 1955. I remember the date so well because our own particular 'pile-driver', thinking to give us an awful warning, distributed copies of the newspaper for us to read. By virtue of that mysterious solidarity which establishes itself wordlessly amongst the victims of any form of tyranny, we all experienced a great inner joy at the result of this investigation. We were delighted to see the plain proof of the fact that not all the efforts of our 'pile-drivers' had succeeded in warping

our minds; delighted to witness their impotent rage; delighted to see that we and our like had obtained a sweet revenge for those dreadful political courses by a display of silent, complete and impenetrable ignorance."

That impotent outburst of the hatred of a people for its masters, with its inner, unspoken mockery, filled me with compassion for the Chinese people. The expression on Ping's face became grave and I could see that the memories were arousing a surge of home-sickness.

"In 1945, at the time the Japanese were finally defeated, I was eighteen," he went on. "I had done my secondary schooling during the war at a high school of the Kuomintang, which had been transferred to Szechwan, then I started my university studies in liberated Shanghai. After that I served with the Communist forces, and returned to my university studies in 1950. I concluded them in 1953 and then worked in the university library until my flight a couple of weeks ago. Thus I had personal experience of the general atmosphere of study under both régimes, and I am in a position to compare them. Under Chiang Kai-shek's régime, the high schools and the universities were hot-beds of political discussion, and there were all kinds of political groups. Many of us were revolutionary, anti-Chiang and pro-Communist. During the first two years of the Communist régime the atmosphere was not greatly different: there was free criticism, intellectual fire-works, and, above all, trust and confidence among the students. But from 1951 onwards all this changed and a cloak of darkness descended. There were no longer impassioned discussions; we no longer wandered around together for hours debating every possible idea; and we no longer dared to express our opinions frankly. Students were now soldiers, subordinates in a cultural army whose régime was as dull and regimented as ordinary military service. Or, if you prefer the picture, we were the worker-ants of a diploma factory; forced into a common mould, hardly daring to raise our heads, each suspicious of all, and all suspicious of each; and all silent. To think that after only five years of a power which I thought would free the spirit of man I looked back on the days of the Kuomintang, whose supposed obscurantism I had loathed, as the halcyon days of non-conformism!"

"So you were brought to abandon all you had previously believed in?"

"Almost everything, I must confess. You know, when you first feel yourself drifting away from Communism, you start by telling yourself that the leaders have veered away from Communist beliefs,

and that the cruelties which revolted us were just the inevitable excesses of the first phase of the revolution, as you suggested. But now, having thought it all over—and I spend all my time thinking over and over what caused the ruin of all our hopes and desires—I have come to the conclusion that my attitude was too indulgent. The most tragic mistake of young people like me was to give our enthusiasm to Communism because we thought it ‘advanced’, whereas ‘historically’, to use its own jargon, it is nothing but a vulgar reaction, a throw-back to ancestral forms of absolutism. That strikes one as paradoxical, because, of course, Communism does build modern factories. But it is not the quantity of steel produced which characterises a society, but the human relationships which prevail in it. From that point of view—and despite all the tons of steel—Communism is far below our ancient mandarin system. You have no idea—indeed, no one can have who has not experienced it in person—of the obtuseness and stupidity and at the same time the pretentiousness of Communist teachings. Their dogmas stifle the human spirit, paralyse and ossify it, to a vastly greater extent than the classical Confucianism, so decried by the innovators, ever did.

“Incidentally, under the Republic, and even under the Empire, although a study of the classics was obligatory, once the professors and students had done what was expected of them in this respect, there was plenty of time left to study other philosophies; and many students became enamoured of Western ideas, including those of Karl Marx, whose works were on the shelves of all university libraries. It was always a grave misunderstanding to talk about the submission of the Chinese people to absolutism; submission applied only to the political sphere. As far as the affairs of State are concerned, it is perfectly true that an age-old tradition has conditioned the Chinese to leave such matters exclusively in the hands of an inaccessible and uncontrollable bureaucracy at the top, whose decisions, whatever they might be, were then accepted without discussion. But in other matters, cultural, philosophical, religious and personal, the Chinese led the life of a free people, though, of course, in the provinces their habits and customs remained traditional and conformist. . . .”

“That’s true not only of China, but of other countries as well. France, for example.”

“Very well, but the point is that those few who did not conform were not interfered with; they could go their own sweet way without let or hindrance. Each man went about his affairs as he pleased;

believed what he liked; read what he liked; and criticised what he didn't like. And when the revolution of Sun Yat-sen came, it still further underlined this personal independence. Now, all the Communists have done is to extend the political absolutism of the former Chinese Emperors to *all* spheres of life, both public and private. They have introduced absolutism into spheres into which it had never previously penetrated: culture and beliefs; and its absolutism was stifling and inflexible from the start. Every student has to belong to a group under the leadership of its 'brigadier', who is responsible for the moral and political development of all the members of the group. It is his duty to keep an eye on everything they do, hear everything they say, and, as far as possible, to control their thoughts—and that both inside and outside the university. The students have to submit to this control, and co-operate actively with it by opening their hearts in public confession so that the 'brigadier' can record whatever he finds of interest and note the zeal of each."

"Are the students subjected to a specially rigorous control because they are destined to carry greater responsibilities later on?"

"No, I don't think so. The regimentation is just as intense outside the universities. All citizens are obligatorily grouped by streets, quarters and so on."

"Yes, I know, I heard about that from the refugee Chang."

"Did he tell you that there is a system of bad marks which are recorded in every man's dossier? When he has collected ten he and his family are placed on the index. There are, for example, bad marks for eating too well and dressing too well. A man can earn others by failing to buy State bonds, by failing to do his political homework properly, by having too many visitors—proof of his inability to break the chains of old bourgeois sentiment. But it is not only in his group that the citizen is kept under surveillance; the process extends to his trade union, or professional association, his co-operative, his literary society, his sports club, and so on. There is no way and no place in which he can escape the all-seeing eye of the Communist Party."

"What the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre calls 'the genuine hell', namely: other people's eyes."

It was obvious that the reference was unfamiliar to Ping, who seemed so far to have been spared Sartre's existentialism. I noted it as at least one good thing the censorship had done for him.

"Do you know," he resumed, "that by a decision of the State Council individual *political* dossiers have been established for all

students? The decision was adopted on July 21, 1957, following on signs of widespread discontent. A record of the daily behaviour of each student must be kept 'particularly in the light of the present campaign for the rectification of thought'. And the decision goes on to say that 'every degree must be subject to a preliminary political examination'."

"I notice that the Chinese Communists have adopted the method of the rulers of Soviet Russia to decree things which have already been practised for a long time. For example, every three years a new decree is issued in Moscow establishing the punishment of forced labour for inexcusable absences from work. The habit of repetition is typically Soviet."

"If that were all we had taken over from Soviet Russia our burdens would be tolerable!" exclaimed Ping. "But we have servilely copied everything else as well. If my country is no longer the old China with its own peculiarities and its own specific civilisation, that does not mean that it is a 'new China'. We're nothing but a blue-print of Bolshevik Russia, a mere tracing, a satellite among other satellites."

The similarity to Ku's complaint struck me forcibly.

"Our factories, our machines, our plans, our bridges, our ideas are all 'made in the Soviet Union'. We have been invaded by their technicians and their advisers both military and political. We have been Sovietised, not only in our factories but in our minds too."

"In that respect I should be very interested to know how far Soviet influence has succeeded in invading Chinese culture."

"At first the Kremlin started to swamp us with its literature; and at all levels, from the pamphlet up to the treatise and the textbook. Since 1949, over 13,000 Soviet books have been translated into Chinese, representing no less than eighty per cent. of our total production of books. One publishing house in Peking specialises in the production of Marxist-Leninist texts edited in Moscow. The People's Publishing House—which is of course a government publishing undertaking—has issued no less than 400 Soviet books. You can imagine that for spiritual inquisitors as cunning as our Communist masters in Peking, it is not enough merely to translate, print and publish masses of these Soviet compilations (expurgated) of the works of Marx and Lenin; they have to make sure that people read them. Only compulsion can bring that about, so in a circular issued in January 1950 all groups above the lowest local level were instructed that within the space of three years all their members must read twelve books—the

list was provided—including expurgated works by Marx, Lenin, and Stalin's book on the Chinese Revolution.

"Further, in all secondary schools and at all universities, Russian was made an obligatory subject at all stages. This was one of the reasons for the silent resentment of Chinese students, who felt an aversion to learning the language of those who had imposed themselves on their country. The French would have felt the same if they had been obliged to learn German during the occupation period. Numerous professors and instructors were imported from the Soviet Union. Most of our textbooks in the upper levels are translations from the Russian, whilst those used at lower levels are often adaptations of books by Soviet authors. You need only consult the publication *People's Education* to see how far the cancer has spread. Even in our primary schools small children learn to read by means of books translated from the Russian, such as *The Mantle of Lenin*, which is a well-known Soviet reader. To show you to what an extent our national dignity and pride are contemptuously ignored in the Communist universities, let me mention that it was a Soviet adviser at the Ministry of Education in Peking who replied to the questions of the primary schoolteachers of Shanghai as to the teaching methods to be used in our primary schools.¹

"Similarly, the Vice-President of the People's University, Hu Hsi-kui, did not hesitate to inform reporters that: 'Our university is organised on the model of higher institutions of education in the Soviet Union. We have over forty Soviet specialists. . . . It is by systematically using the pedagogical methods of the Soviets that we have succeeded in equipping our students with a knowledge of Marxist-Leninism.'² Dead to all sense of shame, the *Pedagogic Journal* of Peking wrote: 'All teachers must obey the decisions of the education section of the Plenum of the Party which provides that in all subjects *at least a third of their words* must have reference to Communism and its illustrious Soviet masters.'³

"Thus our students and pupils, both infant and adolescent, are stuffed with Soviet texts. Whoever happens to be acquainted with the indigestible 'histo-diamatic' sauce they are swamped in, and with the many deliberate falsifications they contain, can hardly doubt that the

¹ I checked the truth of this assertion in the *Wen Hui Pao* of Shanghai on October 22, 1957.

² I was able to verify that this was on July 4, 1953.

³ This was in a number published in April 1952. Incidentally, I reproduce here a translation of the exact text, and not the words Ping quoted from memory.

whole thing is a disaster for our culture, which is naturally flexible and sensitive."

"And apart from the schools and universities, what about adults in their ordinary everyday life? Are they stuffed up with this Soviet pabulum too?"

"They certainly are. Whatever he does, the adult going about his affairs mustn't forget the Leninist lessons he has been taught in school, or the particular third of those pedagogic words which dealt with our illustrious Soviet masters. In order to see that he doesn't, he is swamped with wireless broadcasts, pamphlets, books and lectures. About half of it is devoted to Chinese affairs, the other half is fulsome praise of the Soviet Union. The Soviet-China Friendship Society boasts that apart from its daily bulletins and weekly publications it issues an average of 400 pamphlets every year. These pamphlets are filled from the first line to the last with uncritical worship of the Soviet Union and all its doings. The branches of the Soviet-China Friendship Association in Shanghai, Shantung, Tsingtao and other towns hold meetings every two days or so. The branch of the Association in Yunnan sends out propaganda cars to the aboriginal tribes, such as the Pu-erh, the Kunma and the Likiang; and the tenor of all their wireless broadcasts is 'Long live the Soviet Union!' 'Long live the Soviet Union!' in sickening reiteration.

"In order to display specially important specimens of Soviet culture—which are regarded in official China today as more precious than Song paintings or Ming porcelain—magnificent buildings (though in the pompous Stalinist style of architecture which shocks Chinese artistic sensibilities) have been erected in all our big cities. The Soviet Exhibition in Peking, which is permanent, covers no less than forty-five acres of land! It's not a mere building, it's a province of its own. The corresponding exhibition in Shanghai, which is also permanent, contents itself with about twenty-three acres. The festoons and swags with which these ostentatious buildings are decorated are known *sotto voce* to the Chinese as 'moustachios', an oblique reference to Stalin's walrus appendages. The exhibitions are a pompous display of slogans, graphs, models, posters, photographs and so on, all to the greater glory of the Soviet Union. And on walls over the whole of China is the slogan: 'Learn and apply the experience of the Soviet Union!'"

"But isn't it to some extent objectively true that China could learn from Soviet technique?"

"Of course it is; just as it is true that, say, France can learn from

American technique. But would the French like to be reminded of it all the time in all their towns wherever they went? And in any case, these slogans do not refer merely to Soviet technique, but to dialectical materialism, Leninism, censorship, delation and all the other disagreeable things which are in fashion in Moscow. Even Chinese art is given a Cossack rhythm. I'll accept the Russians for technique, but not for art. What can a Chinese artist—or, indeed, any artist anywhere in the world—learn from a petty bureaucrat turned out in mass production in the schools of Moscow? Yet the whole Chinese Communist press loudly welcomes the presence of 'Soviet experts' in our academies of painting and sculpture, and even in our opera. Our Communist Government openly expresses its 'heartfelt gratitude' to these precious advisers from the Soviet Union, without even suspecting for one moment how odious it is to try to impose them and their views on our most intimate and precious cultural traditions, say the engraving and the ballet."

"Odious? Above all ridiculous!" I exclaimed, bursting into laughter. "Don't those wretched worshippers of histo-diamat, as they call it, realise how grotesque it is for them to try to teach born poets like the Chinese anything? And is your opera, rooted in the native soil, matured by your artists, blossoming in the appreciation of your audiences, and played and replayed throughout the dynasties and the Republic, likely to be 'improved' by Kremlin policemen disguised as advisers?"

"You can afford to laugh at the ridiculousness of the thing because it is taking place far away from your own country. But just imagine what you would feel like if 'Soviet experts' installed themselves in your Comédie Française and set out to teach you how to perform the works of Racine and Molière—with expurgated texts and Marxist commentaries! You wouldn't laugh then, you'd weep."

"Of course I would. And that's what will happen if so many of our so-called 'progressive' intellectuals go on gaping open-mouthed before the wonders of Communism."

"Your Communist Party is vigorous and aggressive as ours was before it took the reins of government. And in their hatred of the bourgeois order your intellectuals are blind, as we were, to the extent of calling for the establishment of a system which is a thousand times worse; and even a thousand times worse in precisely those things which they have at heart. Tell them when you get back, please, that once Communism is in power, it imposes a conformism whose black-

ness and stupidity are beyond belief; tell them, please, that not a line of any single book is free of it, or even the minds of the authors themselves. Tell them, please, so that they may avoid the tragic blunder we made, that under Communism education, literature and art get bogged down in a political morass; and to such an extent that to read those books and listen to those plays becomes a sickening burden to the spirit. Even the history of our country as presented under Communism becomes a sort of pre-Bolshevist parade. They don't *quite* tell us that the Emperor Che Houang Ti, who reigned 2,000 years before Christ, wrote Stalin's thesis in 1928. And as for my personal experience, I studied the French language with heart and soul, but then I suffered bitterly because all your great authors disappeared from China under the Communists. It was as though I had lost my dearest friends."

"Do you mean that Montaigne and Voltaire have been purged?"

"Worse than that; they have been expurgated. Their authentic works have been withdrawn and in their places all we have now are bowdlerised anthologies complete with Marxist comments; for example, the praise of friendship in Montaigne is 'explained' by the rise of bourgeois commerce. The only unexpurgated French books you can find in our bookshops today are Fontaine's fables and the works of Claude Roy, Maurice Thorez, Aragon and Simone Théry. But far from offering us any escape from our terrible reality, such books plunge us cruelly back into them, for they are nothing but paeans of praise in favour of the things that oppress us. They are French authors, but all they have to offer us is more propaganda for Stalin and Mao, and that makes us feel sick. One of my professors, who had been a great friend of my father's, used to allow me to come to him, with great precautions and at night, to read one or two books by Gide, Malraux and Jaurès, which he kept hidden under the floor-boards. It was a great secret, and a great sign of his trust in me. It could have cost him his life."

"If my memory serves me rightly, there is here a genuine analogy with the Emperor Che Houang Ti; didn't he do his best to destroy all the ancient books, and didn't the scholars of his day have to meet secretly in caves to read and make new copies of those old books?"

"Yes, that's very true. And those scholars often paid for their temerity with their lives. Incidentally, that is precisely what did happen to my old professor in the end: someone denounced him and he was deported, which, for a man of his age, was equivalent to the death sentence."

We were standing and talking in a narrow corridor, and I noticed that from time to time he seemed to look anxiously at the right-hand wall. The first part of our conversation had taken place in a restaurant where I had invited him to lunch, but when it was time for him to go back to the office in which he was employed, I had not finished my questioning and I decided to ask his employer if he would give Ping another hour to talk with me, justifying my request by the investigation I was conducting. Ping was working in the mail department of an export and import firm, and the work was boring, ill paid, and far below his capacities. His employer, an Englishman more interested in his business than in anything else, granted my request, though with bad grace; observing that Ping was there to do his work, "not to dabble in politics". I was tempted to reply that he owed his profitable business to the fact that others were prepared to "dabble in politics", but I refrained, not wishing to turn him against Ping in any way.

As there was no other place to talk, not even a small ante-room, we went out into the bare, gloomy, ill-ventilated corridor, and continued our conversation standing, since there was nowhere to sit down. Whilst I was thinking somewhat contemptuously of his employer Ping surprised me by exclaiming: "I don't want to go back to Communist China!" And again he looked anxiously at the wall which separated us from the office. Finally he explained that he was afraid that we might be overheard from the other side. I did my best to reassure him.

"You're in Hongkong now. No doubt capitalism here has many defects, but at least it has one advantage: they're more interested in making money than in listening at keyholes. No one is bothering his head about what we are saying to each other."

However, seeing that even this wasn't sufficient to put him at ease, I drew him outside on to the landing where the lift was.

"In Shanghai I would never have dared to talk to you as I have done today," he confessed.

He supposed he was making a revelation, and he obviously shared that poignant feeling of all refugees that no one but themselves could have any idea of what they had gone through; a feeling which reveals both the depth of their suffering and the degree of their isolation.

"Is it true," I continued, "that in Communist China all students are supported by the State?"

"Yes, that is so. They don't pay school fees, as I believe students do in your country. And in addition Chinese students are given food and lodging. Or at least that was so up to August 22, 1955, when the

Ministry of Education issued a ukase to the effect that State support should be given only to really necessitous students. The document explained that to continue giving support to all students 'tended to encourage them in wasteful habits, and to create the deplorable impression that the State was under an obligation to do everything for them'.⁴

"As for our wasteful habits," Ping went on. "We slept in dormitories in tiered bunks and without covering. Each of us had about six feet by two and a half, 'the size of a coffin' as we used to say. There was no wardrobe, no personal corner. You folded your clothes and put them with your books at the foot of your bunk. The refectory was a bare hall in which we ate standing up, shoulder to shoulder. Our food—sufficient in calorific value—was produced in enormous basins; 'troughs' we called them, thinking of pigs. You handed over your meal ticket and then helped yourself. That cost fifteen yuan a month. Our conditions of life were like those of soldiers in barracks."⁵

"Soldiers in Chinese Communist barracks perhaps," I said, "because, believe me, our soldiers sleep in proper beds with proper covering, and when they have their meals they sit down at proper tables."

"Well, anyway, we didn't. But to return to this question of government grants to students. There are various categories of grants: full grants, two-third grants, food grants and temporary grants. The student requiring a grant must present a certificate from his Ch'ü⁶ or Hsiang⁷ giving the following information: his previous work, his economic situation, and the political record of all the members of his family. In 1958 the number of State grants was again reduced,⁸ and this time very drastically. Each year the government fixes the quotas for all the courses held at the universities. Students seeking admission are allowed to indicate their preference with regard to the subjects they wish to take, but the decision of the University Committee is final."

"What proportion of those applying find that they are able to take the subjects they want?"

⁴ I subsequently confirmed what Ping said from the *Jen Min Jih Pao* of September 2, and 7, 1955.

⁵ Ping's description of life at Shanghai University conforms point by point with that provided by Leighton Stuart describing a new university he visited in Peking.

⁶ An administrative area like a canton.

⁷ A number of small villages grouped administratively.

⁸ The *People's Daily* of January 3, 1958, deals at length with this reduction and the reasons for it.

"I should say less than a third."

"And the course of study itself; is it relatively easy?"

"No; a student's programme is overloaded. He must work sixty hours a week. But that doesn't mean sixty hours in all; it means that he has to spend that time either in the lecture hall or the laboratory. After that, he must find time for personal study. In addition he will find that many Sundays and holidays are taken up by what is called 'voluntary' labour, either in the fields or factories. In consequence the health of university students has greatly deteriorated, and ulcers, tuberculosis, neurasthenia and anaemia due to a combination of overwork and underfeeding are common. By the end of 1955, the situation had grown positively alarming, and the authorities reduced the pressure a little. As I have not been able to dissociate myself (so far, at least) from my experiences as a student, I have made a collection of 'self-criticisms' taken from the Chinese Communist press since I have been in Hongkong. As you are interested I will send you those relating to health, hygiene and feeding at the universities."

A few days after this interview I received the promised extracts. All of them referred to the same complaints: "exhausting overwork", and "revolting food".⁹ It must be added that in October 1955, as some compensation for the reduction of pressure presumably, the authorities launched a great campaign for food economy at universities. Here are one or two highlights from this campaign: "The students of the University of Tsinghua exhorted each other to save at least an ounce of rice a day each, and to make sure that not a grain was dropped on the floors or left in the bowls. . . . They organised mutual supervision groups and a competition for saving the kitchen remnants."¹⁰ "At the medical faculty in Harbin, groups of students collected the remains of boiled noodles, pieces of bread left over, and surplus soya, and made puddings with the addition of yeast."¹¹ "At the Railway Staff College the students decided that anyone who left a grain of rice in his bowl should write a confession and receive a public reprimand."¹²

⁹ Among a dozen others there were cuttings from the *Kwang Ming Jih Pao* of January 28, April 12, June 3 and November 17, 1955; from the *Chung Kuo Ching Nien Pao* of February 1 and May 10, 1955; and two editorials from the *Jen Min Jih Pao* of September 4 and October 4, 1956, which admitted that much of the trouble was due to overwork.

¹⁰ *Kwang Ming Jih Pao*, March 31, 1955.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, October 7, 1955.

¹² *Wen Hui Pao*, November 2, 1955.

The *Kwang Ming Jih Pao* of November 3, 1955, informs us that in their spare time (suppressing our astonishment that there is such a thing) students occupy themselves with "tasks of social utility", including military exercises, marches, shooting practice, visits to military units, discussions of important books such as *The Defence of the Frontiers*, and *The Total Annihilation of the Enemy*; a further indication, if any were needed, of the militaristic character of Chinese Communist education.

"There's very little doubt then," I said to Ping, "that apart from their studies, Chinese students earn every penny of their grants by extra work."

"None at all. And there's another point to be noted: educational grants are normally the sign of an enlightened society when they assist talented but indigent students to pursue their studies. But in Communist China the great majority of the students who receive grants are the sons of bureaucrats, and are therefore not indigent. In voting these grants, the bureaucrats relieve themselves of an expense properly theirs, thus turning part of the public revenues to their own account. Moreover, our students are not given a free choice of the subjects they study, or of the careers they wish to follow. They are given employment, and sent to this, that or the other place, according to the requirements of the State. Only the sons of really high officials are able to free themselves from the normal obligations. In short, in China the university grants are not a help bestowed on poor students; they pay for studies the sons of the privileged class carry out under the control and for the profit of the totalitarian State.

"And finally, there is always the sword of Damocles suspended over their heads if they should permit themselves the slightest heterodoxy. There is, in fact, one privilege which not even the privileged in the new society may allow themselves, and that is to criticise Communist doctrine. There are said to be four categories of forced labour in Communist China, but there is actually a fifth: that category performed in the fields by those students who are ploughed in their examinations. And this is not necessarily because they are dull; even the most brilliant student can find himself sent back to the grindstone because he has failed to get sufficient marks in dialectical materialism. Even among the sons of the most privileged cadres, only those are admitted subsequently to the caste of their fathers who repeat like gramophones, and without expressing the slightest doubt, the political formulas learnt by heart; or those ambitious ones who don't believe a

word of it, but who are prepared to repeat it all and set themselves out to flatter the dispensers of position and place."

Obviously thinking that he was making a further revelation, he leant towards me and said: "Do you know what I have discovered? *Communists are, above all, liars.* To titivate their own 'historical' record, they claim credit for our students' revolt in 1919 although at that time the Communist Party did not even exist. They also claim credit for Sun Yat-sen's revolution, although previously they have always insulted and denigrated it. They have even gone to the extent of annexing Wuang Chung; and even Wang Ngan-she, who lived around the year 1000, turning him into 'a State socialist' and a precursor of Karl Marx. The Communists lie deliberately and without any shame or conscience. They lie for self-interest, on principle, by habit and without limit. Lying with them has become second nature. Everything they say is distorted, falsified and grotesquely travestied to serve their propaganda, their machinations and their aims. They are not professional revolutionaries but professional liars."

This wholesale condemnation reminded me of Ciliga's book, written after working in the Soviet Union for twelve years and entitled *In the Land of Lies*. The Communist terror is spectacular and dramatic and it so impresses itself on men's minds that they regard it as the chief specific characteristic of Communism. But in reality its most profound characteristic is the lie. I sometimes wonder whether there was ever a régime anywhere in the world at any time which lied so outrageously. The Communist régime even deliberately lies when all the world knows that it is lying, and even despite the fact that it knows that all the world knows it. However, I made no comment on what Ping had said; instead, I put to him my final question.

"When you were in Shanghai, did you hear anything at all of the people's revolt in Hungary?"

"Yes, we did. The press reported it, and during the first week the tone of its reports was even quite sympathetic to the Hungarian revolutionaries. Then suddenly the tone changed. In the meantime the great leader Khrushchev had denounced the Hungarian revolutionaries as 'bandits' and 'Fascists', and crushed the revolution with his tanks, so Mao's press now lined up obsequiously behind Moscow. But the moral damage had been done, and our suspicions were aroused. We kept our ears open for the slightest rumour, and our hearts continued to beat for the Hungarian revolutionaries, though, of course, we had to keep our feelings to ourselves and not show the slightest sign of them."

Ping now ended his remarks on a defeatist note which will no doubt depress those of his fellow countrymen who are still fighting heroically to free their country from Communist oppression. However, I propose to reproduce it here because I owe it to the obligation I have undertaken to give a full report of all the evidence placed before me.

"We Chinese will never be able to revolt as the Hungarians did. And that isn't because we are afraid of fighting and dying. But at the slightest sign of deviation, never mind revolt, they cut off our food supplies—and we *are* afraid of that. In Europe you have reserves of food. In China we have none, and the Communist power holds us in subjection by the threat to starve our children."

"I think you're too pessimistic. A régime as inhuman as that must collapse one day. Incidentally, doesn't the Communist press constantly print reports of disaffection among the students?"

"Yes, that's true. On a number of occasions, students have had sufficient courage to put up hand-written notices on the walls of the universities protesting against the régime of oppression. And not long ago, there was actually a revolt of students in Hanyang, and the Peking wireless announced that the three ringleaders had been executed. Just a moment . . ."

He rummaged around in his case and produced two old newspaper cuttings which had been carefully preserved amongst his papers.

"Read this pearl from the *Kwang Ming Jih Pao* of October 26, 1956. Isn't it a revelation and a confession of the failure of the revolution?"

I took the first cutting and began to read:

"At the University of Peking a number of students supposed to be studying Hindustani actually spent their time studying English instead. . . . At every possible opportunity they stressed individual liberty, the way of life of the individual, the tastes of the individual, the opinions of the individual. . . . The principles of liberty have become fashionable, and that is a grave situation."

With one of those nervous, half-scared gestures I had noticed in him before, Ping now handed me the second cutting, saying: "The Hungarians have left me a testament which illuminates and sums up better than I could possibly do myself what I feel intuitively. Read this!"

I took the second cutting and read the following:

"But we must tell you what Socialism is *not*: a society in which a man who has done no wrong must nevertheless constantly fear the police is *not* a socialist society. A society in which a man can be condemned without trial is *not* a socialist society. A State whose leaders are nominated by themselves; a State which does not permit its citizens to travel abroad; a State in which there are more informers than nurses, and more people in prison than in hospital; a State in which citizens are obliged to lie; a State which produces first-class jet planes but wretched shoes; a State in which the coward prospers and the brave man perishes; a State in which a lawyer does his best to secure his client's conviction instead of defending him; and a State in which the philosophers are always in agreement with the Ministers and Generals, is *not* a Socialist State."

I did not tell Ping that this text, which a Hongkong newspaper had erroneously attributed to a Hungarian who had risen in revolt against Kadar, had actually been written by a Polish Communist student and published in *Po Prostu*. Today that journal no longer exists and its editors and contributors are in gaol. But I was deeply moved to discover that despite the superficial and somewhat racial views which charge the people of Asia with an organic inclination towards despotism, the vibrations of freedom which shook Budapest and Warsaw were also felt strongly in the hearts of the sons of Han in the universities of Shanghai and Peking.

THE MERCHANT WANG

IF YOU were asked to mention the types you spontaneously associated with China you would probably reply, in this order: the peasant, the mandarin, and the merchant. I have respected this order in my inquiry, because even today the make-up of modern China is based essentially on the peasant and the mandarin—though the mandarin is of a new type. As to the old merchant type—which even now stands for China outside China, smiling affably, with inexhaustible resources, untiring, discreet, eloquent and pliable—it is a dying race in Communist China, and I met an example of it only later. The man I was to meet now was truly the last of the Mohicans.

On the way to meet him, Fung, my interpreter, and I naturally talked shop.

"It goes without saying," he said with his habitual phlegm, "that agriculture, as limited as it is in the New Territories, with only seasonal fishing (fishermen can't take their boats out at all during the typhoon season), can't possibly feed two and a half million people. The real and main resource of Hongkong is trade."

"Hasn't it been hampered by the United Nations' embargo on the export of strategic materials to Communist China?"

"The commercial expansion which took place here in the post-war period has been phenomenal. The value of exports and imports in 1951 totalled £720,000,000. It is quite true that the embargo did cause a drop in trade between Hongkong and the Chinese mainland representing fifteen per cent. of the total, of which it represented seventy-five per cent. in 1938. The blow was so severe that a visiting American journalist wrote at the time that Hongkong was 'a moribund city' and even questioned whether Hongkong would be able to survive."

"How did it, in fact, get out of its difficulties so satisfactorily? Because as far as I can see the colony is commercially flourishing today."

"Well, you know, for the Chinese the abnormal quickly becomes

normal, and difficulties are merely something to be got over. And we got over them by creating a modern industry from the ground up and in record time. Our trade recovered as a result of that innovation."

Fung said no more, but my mind still played on the subject while the car was taking us to a popular restaurant in Victoria where I was to meet my man. Hongkong is a free port, which means that there is no duty to be paid on any article, except liqueurs and scent. From that you can probably guess the rest. Tourists, visitors and traders come to this Tom Tiddler's Ground from all over Asia to buy what they require. You have to see it to believe it. People push and jostle each other, overflowing from the pavements into the roadway, crowding round the shop windows on both sides of the street and in every street, alley-way and square. There are huge crowds of people everywhere, in rooms and attics, on stairways and in doorways. And the attraction? You can find the products of the whole world there at incredible prices: all the inventions of the designers, all the dreams of the artists, all the brilliance of the technicians of five continents. Smiling shop assistants wait on you patiently, but nevertheless persuasively. As a matter of fact I think I was about the only visitor in Hongkong who had not come on account of that great display and those low prices. It was too much for me, and I felt myself cheated. After all I am a woman. So I rearranged my time-table, did a little juggling with my budget, and set off to take advantage of that Dorado of commerce which is Hongkong.

When I arrived back after one memorable shopping day I found myself in possession of a Hindu sari, a German typewriter, a Japanese camera, a piece of Chinese ivory which looked like lace, a pair of slippers embroidered in Formosa, a pair of South-American mules, an Egyptian crocodile belt and a pair of American nylons. Never before in my life had I bought so favourably. I had to pay for it subsequently, on my fourteen-day visit to Israel in fact, when I lived on very short commons: milk, potato pancakes and bread. But it was worth it. What woman could have resisted a buying spree in Hongkong?

We waited for the merchant Wang in a small room with many mirrors on the first floor of a café-restaurant, sitting before the obligatory huge glass of tea, our ears pounded by the rattle of various slot-machines all around. You might have thought yourself at an airfield for jet planes. Bumpings, bangings, clashing, rattlings, explosions and the stuttering of miniature machine-guns; each slot-machine had its own particular noise, and they were all going at once. I was on hot

coals; my nerves, I felt, would never be able to stand that persistent racket. But I dared not suggest that we should go somewhere else, as I would have done in Paris. The politeness and extreme consideration of China seemed to have taken hold of me too.



At last Wang the merchant appeared, looking very dignified in a long grey woollen robe. His face, the face of an old man, was a mask of sorrow and resignation, and his gestures were reduced to the absolute minimum. The only things really alive about him seemed his eyelids, the inflamed eyelids of a man who had wept much. I felt something like Orpheus visiting the underworld and encountering the living shades.

Fortunately the usual exchanges of politeness and mutual bows helped me over the embarrassment I felt at the sight of the apparition. Fung then indicated that we were to leave. So I was not to have to suffer that infernal din after all! We went up in a lift to the sixteenth floor, where, in a room modestly furnished, but seraphically quiet, we were served with an excellent meal: swallow-nest soup, duck with celery, shark's fins with bamboo shoots, and sparrow's brains. It was delicious, and I managed it, down to the last grain of rice, with chopsticks, having mastered the art of their use. Unfortunately that delicate and civilised food was almost out of place because the story Wang had to tell me was pitiful. I hardly had to question him; what he had to say poured from his bloodless lips in a steady stream.



"I lived in Changsha in Hunan, near the great lake Tong Ting Hou. It is a quite beautiful town, and there I traded in cloth, spices and jasmine tea. After the arrival of Mao's troops I carried on business as far as possible as usual, being misled by the constant assurances of his agents that the best way to serve the people was to do just that. For a while I thought I had been well advised not to follow the example of many of my business colleagues, who had fled to Hongkong, leaving all their possessions behind them. It was quite true that goods were becoming scarce, and in order that my business should not suffer too severely, I added the sale of books, writing materials, ivory and medicaments to my usual lines."

What Wang said did not greatly surprise me; the Chinese is a commercial genius, and one is almost invariably able to find what one

wants amongst his varied stock. It is thanks to these qualities that the Chinese have obtained almost a monopoly of trade in the Far East. In Vietnam, in the Philippines and in Cambodia, the gayest, the liveliest and the most prosperous quarters are always where the Chinese buy and sell. I recalled having to change Swiss francs in an out-of-the-way place in Cambodia. No one could help me—except with the advice: “Go to the Chinese who sells postcards and chocolate. He’ll help you.” And, in fact, my difficulty was settled within five minutes.

“I came to the conclusion,” went on Wang, “that people had made a bogey out of Communism. Or at least that Chinese Communists had nothing in common with those Bolshevik Communists of Russia of evil memory. It is quite true that every Sunday we heard shooting, but that was a matter which concerned only the Kuomintang, and I regarded it as the usual settlement of accounts between two political parties, and therefore as no concern of mine. As far as we merchants were concerned, Mao’s agents were polite to us, and we had nothing to complain of.

“How foolish it would have been of me at my age—I was sixty-two—to run away and leave the fruits of a lifetime of hard work behind, I thought with satisfaction. And that seemed true, particularly as I had my mother and two widowed daughters together with their many children to support. My sons-in-law had been killed during the revolution. Unfortunately, I have since been given good reason to see that I was the foolish one. In the end I had to flee, and at the age of sixty-eight, leaving behind not only my possessions, but members of my dearly loved family. And now I am living on charity in a refugee camp, whilst my more prudent colleagues, who had the good sense not to be taken in by the blandishments of the Communists, and fled in good time, have now little businesses of their own here in Hongkong. Six years ago things were different; it was easy enough to find a small shop. Since then, everything has become overcrowded. And, in addition, the health and vigour I possessed even at the age of sixty-two have been worn away by my experiences in Communist China.

“The trouble began one May morning in 1952, when the Communist mayor called all the local tradesmen together and declared: ‘The Government of the People is displeased with you because you have been guilty of fraud and swindles of all kinds. Because you have been business men under a bourgeois régime you have capitalist consciences. Scientific materialism tells us that you never will have anything but capitalist consciences. Do not think that we are reproach-

ing you with this. It is not your fault. You can't help it; you have inherited it. The only thing is that it necessarily induces you to commit offences against the people. But if there is anyone amongst you who has not committed such offences let him come up onto this platform and say so publicly.'

"We looked at each other in dismay. At least we had learnt one thing, and this was that the less obvious you made yourself under the new régime the better it was for you. In consequence none of us dared to go up onto the platform and say publicly that we had not committed any offences against the people. 'So,' continued the mayor after a moment or two's silence, 'I see by your silence that you all confess to having robbed the people. But now you will have to make restitution. Only a complete confession of all your offences and a firm purpose of amendment can wash you clean of your vicious capitalist past. Only after that will you be fit to live under Communism and worthy of the honour of working for it. And now which of you will take the lead in confessing your capitalist offences?' At one moment his voice was dripping honey, and the next it was unmistakably threatening.

"Two tradesmen we didn't know very well because they had only come to our town within the past few weeks, now mounted the platform, and immediately began a miraculously detailed account of all their sins as capitalists. It appeared that they had cooked their accounts, given false weight, dealt on the Black Market, sanded the sugar, watered the milk, used false labels, made false income-tax returns, cornered goods in short supply, and I don't know what else. We were shocked and horrified. But worse was to come, because one of them declared that he had deliberately sold bad biscuits to working men in order that they should fall ill and that in consequence socialist production should suffer. Then they both humbly expressed their profound repentance, promised to be good boys in the future, and begged to be forgiven. They were like two curs crawling on their bellies and begging for caresses instead of blows.

"Intimidated by their example, three others, local tradesmen whom we knew as scared and timid fellows, now got onto the platform and confessed in halting voices to one or two minor peccadillos. It was by comparing the first two with the other three, whom we knew to be authentic, that you could easily tell that the first pair, with their facile confessions, their Marxist jargon, and the enormity and multifariousness of their alleged crimes, were really decoy ducks put up to entice the rest of us. Apart from our three weaker brethren, we kept silent. To

go on that platform and behave in that contemptible fashion was quite beyond us, but fear crawled in our bellies. We realised that the situation was serious.

"‘Very well,’ said the mayor when it was obvious that no one else was coming forward, ‘you have been caught out point blank, and you can’t remember all your swindles on the spur of the moment. You may go therefore and in the meantime you will each be given a circular to fill out, and you must return it to us within two weeks. Think over all your crimes, don’t forget any, and confess them all. It is the only way to save yourselves.’

"I can speak only for myself of course, but I can tell you that I had done nothing of that sort; if for no other reason than because I knew, as we all knew, how mercilessly the new régime dealt with that sort of thing. I had made a proper return of all my transactions, all my profits and all my stock. And when the circular arrived, I set that down."

"And what happened then?"

"A few weeks later I was called to the police, where I was told that my capitalist upbringing had deadened my conscience, and that in reality it was scientifically quite impossible that as a capitalist I should not have been up to all sorts of illegal tricks to swindle both my customers and the tax authorities. If I were not prepared to do my best to change my dirty capitalist conscience I should be sent away to join the other capitalist counter-revolutionaries. I insisted that I had conducted my business honestly, and suggested that I had been slandered by some discontented customer or by some jealous rival. ‘Give me the alleged facts at the basis of your accusation,’ I said, ‘and I shall easily be able to show you that they are baseless.’

"I really was innocent of the things they charged me with, but I was even more innocent than that. Despite the disagreeable experience at the Town Hall, I still thought that the thing had been brought about by the real misbehaviour of some of my colleagues—after all, such things do happen. As for myself, I felt sure that there had been a mistake, and that if they would go into the details we could soon clear it up and I should be rehabilitated in their eyes. I pleaded with them, I asked permission to demonstrate my innocence, and when they were adamant I wanted to appeal to the higher authorities. Later on, of course, I learnt that tens of thousands of my colleagues all over the country were being subjected to just the same persecution. And still later I realised that my guilt or innocence had nothing whatever to do with the case. It was a political action, deliberately prepared and

ordered from above, as all Communist actions are. These subordinate officials who were charging us with all kinds of fraud had no proofs whatever to support their allegations. They were merely carrying out their instructions in the vast campaign Mao had decided on to intimidate the middle class with the intention of softening us up for the final dissolution. Because this was so, it was quite pointless to attempt to prove one's innocence, or to attempt to appeal above the heads of the subordinate officials. But by the time I understood that, it was too late. I was already broken and ruined."

"As far as I can see, it seems to have been the '*five antis*' campaign mentioned to me by another refugee. The dates and the procedure coincide."

"Yes, that's right. It was the terrible Wu Fan which had descended on us. You know, since the advent of the Communist power we had lived so cooped up and so withdrawn that we hardly knew what was going on outside, and everything took us by surprise. We had only the local newspaper to read, and although it had mentioned those five antis, it had always done so in moderate terms, presenting the campaign as beneficial, an effort to stamp out corruption; and that was, after all, a good thing. For this reason it was some time before I recognised those five antis as the grisly threat they really were. We never dreamt that they would affect us, because as business men we had always sought to live on good terms with the authorities and to respect the law."

For a moment Wang closed his eyes and leant back as though lost in his depressing memories. After a while he opened them again and continued.

"I have often tried to justify my credulity," he said, "but I can't. The poorest coolie in the town knew by this time, after three years of Communist power, that when the press talked about a spontaneous movement of the people to rectify and purify anything it really meant that a big campaign was under way to abuse and vilify some section of the people."

"If I'm not mistaken," I put in, "your great sage Confucius says that there is no dishonour in deceiving oneself by believing in the good intentions of others."

Wang had been staring at the wall, but now his eyes turned to me, and there was gratitude in them.

"Another refugee told me," I went on, "that this Wu Fan campaign was particularly savage, and that it was carried out ruthlessly by tens of thousands of kanpous all over the country."

"Hundreds of thousands," he corrected, "and millions of victims. Public meetings took place from morning to night, and those tradesmen like myself who were unwilling to admit the false charges made against them were treated as though they were bloodsuckers, profiteers and counter-revolutionaries. All their known customers were visited in the hope of gathering complaints and evidence against them. And at the same time everything possible was done to turn their employees against them, no doubt with both threats and promises. In any case, one evening my cashier and my two assistants, who had always been very loyal to me, stood up in front of customers and accused me of I don't know what turpitude. After that, they didn't say another word to me apart from what was absolutely necessary for the carrying on of the business. In the meantime, those meetings at which I had to appear continued. Then, one day, the manager of a small branch shop that I ran in a town in the interior wrote to me, telling me that as I had not confessed to my crimes, he was not sending me the sums due to me from the business.

"Harassed and persecuted in this way, one after another of my colleagues gave way and confessed everything they were asked to confess. However, there was still a small group of tradesmen who obstinately persisted in proclaiming their innocence, and I was one of them; and so the next turn of the screw was made. Groups of young men arrived in our shops with the avowed intention of 'twisting the tail of the tiger'. Those who came to me in my home had neither heart nor bowels. They went through my books dozens of times in the hope of finding something, they checked my stock again and again, and turned everything upside down. At the same time they watched my every movement and noted down my most harmless words, seeking to twist them into something else in hours of brutal questioning. Of course, whilst they were in my shop, customers preferred to stay away. Even my old friends dared not visit me any more. Whoever has not gone through protracted torture of that kind has no idea how shattering it can be. Soon your morale and your physical strength begin to break, and you tremble at a shadow or at nothing at all. And that is their aim; they are out to break you, to ruin you, to throw your life completely off balance. Those devils remained in my shop for three months, but despite all their efforts during that time they found absolutely nothing they could use against me; not in my books, not in my stocks, not in my ration cards, not in my returns. Nevertheless, in the end they got me, and this is how.

"One day their leader, who was the secretary of a Communist cell, came to me and said: 'We have been here for three months now, examining your affairs, and every morning, every midday and every evening you have given us cups of tea. Now the ration of tea allowed you provides only three cups of tea per day per person. Where did you obtain the rations to give us all tea regularly?'

"I offered you the tea merely as a matter of traditional hospitality.'

"What right had you to do that? You did not ask us for our tea cards. No, it is perfectly obvious that you have been indulging in Black Market transactions and robbing the people of tea. That's how much your dirty capitalist conscience is worth.'

"The fact was," Wang explained, "that I and my family had been going without tea during this period in order that I could acquit myself of my obligations of hospitality towards these unwelcome guests; because the obligations of hospitality do not cease when the guest is unworthy. However, over this tea business I was hauled off to prison."

"And what happened to you there?"

"They made me lose my memory. It is all very confused in my mind and very depressing to explain."

"Just tell me the outstanding facts."

Wang sat there with his hands folded in the lap of his robe, which began to take on the appearance of a shroud, and thought for some time.

"Each time the police inspector questioned me he added: 'Since the government has seen fit to arrest you, you are guilty. You know very well that we have been watching you for a long time now, and that we have gathered incriminating evidence and witnesses against you. The government never arrests anyone but proved criminals. All you need do now is to confess and the government will show you clemency. But if you go on denying your crimes, then I warn you that you will be most severely punished.' I still replied that, as I had committed no crimes, I could not confess to any. 'Take care!' the inspector warned, 'that is *K'ang tsiu*. You can find yourself in a tight corner, because we have all the proof of your crimes.' *K'ang tsiu* by the way means a refusal to admit a crime."

"Didn't you ask them what the proofs were?"

"Of course I did, but the police said they weren't going to tell me; all I had to do was to confess. It would be a fine thing for criminals,

they said, if the police always told them what proofs they held against them, because then the criminals would confess only what the police knew, and conceal the rest. Sometimes they would tell me that all my colleagues had confessed and had been set free, and that I was the only one who was being obstinate. Which meant, they said, that I would be the only one to be punished. Or they would beg me to be reasonable, saying that the government wished me no harm, but that if I didn't confess I would have to be sent to a camp, and that the government didn't want at all."

"What was it exactly they wanted you to confess?"

"That I had defrauded the tax authorities, and that I owed the government millions. And that was quite untrue. They had other means of exerting pressure too. For a couple of hours every evening the prisoners were brought together under supervision and they were supposed to encourage each other to recognise the great benefits of Communism, and to confess their crimes to each other, referring to themselves as 'the vile refuse of capitalism', and so on. That was called 'the reform of thinking'. One of the men in my cell had suffered it a hundred times. The group leader also gave us lessons in Marxist-Leninism, and when we had learnt a lesson one day we had to repeat it word for word the next. Sometimes he would demand that we should confess the offences we had committed whilst in prison. 'What breaches of discipline have you been guilty of?' he would demand. One would reply perhaps: 'I made a noise in the latrines'; or another would say: 'I dozed off during study'; and another would confess: 'I looked out of the window.' And then the others were urged to add anything they could to these confessions. 'The only hope you have of getting out of prison,' they would say, 'is to confess everything, and then reform your thinking.' Some of the prisoners did their best, praising the Party and the police, and congratulating themselves that they had at last been placed under lock and key because it gave them an opportunity of cleaning their brains and beginning to think properly.

"One evening they gave us an exercise to do. We had to answer the question: 'What was the worst thought you have had this month?' From their point of view I had certainly had some very disobliging thoughts: for example I would have liked to strangle the police inspector, and I would have liked to see Communism and all its works swallowed up by an earthquake. Compared with such thoughts the idea of suicide, which I had also had, was a mere nothing, so I took good care not to confess them."

I looked away in order that Wang should not see that I felt sick at the humiliations to which he had been subjected. But suffering makes people very sensitive to pity and Wang guessed my thoughts.

"Not that such humiliations were the worst things," he said. "At first, of course, they are very terrible, and they make you feel sick inside; they constrict your throat until you're physically incapable of speaking, even when your reason tells you that you should speak. And yet, as some consolation for your wounded dignity, it is a fact that a feeling of humiliation does at least belong to that stage in which you still feel yourself a man. But for a long time we had been forced much lower than that; we had been turned into obedient dogs trained to do tricks. In that stage, our chief anxiety was to avoid further punishment. It was very difficult to invent an 'evil thought' which was evil enough to satisfy the requirements of the group leader, but just not sufficiently evil to bring down new punishment on you and involve you in some new offence. The one I 'confessed' was: 'The Communist authorities promise us our liberty if only we will confess, but in reality they're treating us like the donkey and the carrot—we'll never have a chance of getting at the carrot.'"

"It will be difficult to convince people in the West that the rulers of a great State could possibly behave like that to their people, but you are only confirming what I have already heard from many other refugees."

"But I think the worst thing of all was being constantly compelled to denounce one's fellow prisoners. The group leader demanded written confessions concerning everything that was done or said against the regulations, or against 'correct thought'. The denunciations were then put up in the cells, and the victims had to explain themselves in public, to confess their faults and to explain what vicious habits had inspired their misbehaviour. You had to denounce your neighbour, denounce him and keep on denouncing him. It was impossible to save yourself; you just had to take part in the villainy, because denunciations were considered a proof of your sincerity. If you didn't denounce the misdeeds of your fellow prisoners, that was taken as a proof of your bad will. And if you showed such bad will towards the crimes of others, then *a fortiori* you were undoubtedly inwardly manifesting the same ill will where your own misdeeds were concerned.

"Incidentally there are printed denunciation forms available; all you have to do is to ask a warder for them. On the front you wrote the name of the person you were denouncing, together with his

address if he happened not to be in prison yet, followed by the crime you were accusing him of. On the other side you put down all the details of your charge. I have known fellow prisoners fill them up by the dozen."

"How did you get out of prison in the end? Did you finally 'confess'?"

"Yes, of course I did. What else could I do? I 'confessed' that I had defrauded the State of several millions in taxes. Then, of course, I had to make 'restitution', and for that I had to sell my branch in the interior. One of the Party co-operatives agreed to buy it—for the exact sum of my supposed tax evasion. The money my manager owed me was confiscated by the State in order to meet the expenses my 'obstinacy' had involved, so they said. But at least I was not—not yet—completely ruined. I still had my main shop, and, above all, my family had not been interfered with. At least I had been spared the terrible moral suffering of some of my colleagues, who had found themselves denounced by their own families. I thought my troubles were over. But alas, there's always only one end. I was finally crushed by a second run of their steam-roller."

I noticed that he used the same expression as Ku had used.

"However, for the time being, life seemed to go on as usual, at least on the surface. The Wu Fan campaign stopped as though by magic. But something had changed all the same; something had snapped. Something had happened to me and those like me. I had become so thin and I was in such a physical state that when my mother and my daughters saw me again, they burst into tears. But I did my best to cheer them up and told them to dry their tears.

"Personally I was feeling calmer, because as a result of my experience I had determined to emigrate. By this time I had learned a thing or two about Communism and its behaviour, and so I proceeded extremely cautiously. I planned to get to Canton and there to suborn an official to provide me with a pass to get me to Hongkong. At my age, and with my mother, my daughters and their small children, I could obviously not hope to get out of the country illegally. But I had to act with extreme caution, because anyone who shows a desire to get close to the frontier, and to the free world on the other side, automatically comes under suspicion. I had to call on all my cousins and other relatives in various parts of China to invent a story to make my desire to change my residence seem reasonable. And my arrangements with them had to be by word of mouth. For every journey I made I had to

find some excuse in my state of health. We were like mice who had to move around with the utmost caution in order to avoid the cat. It took us two years of unobtrusive manœuvring to get a cousin of mine who worked in the Customs service transferred to Canton. And another year was taken up in getting my mother established in Canton with him. According to the agreed plan, my cousin then put in for a post in Tibet, and his chances seemed quite good, because he had already been there for some time with a party of middlemen and had learnt the language, and that was rare in China. If this part of the plan succeeded, I was then to offer my business to the local co-operative and to request that I should be allowed to go to Canton in order to look after my aged mother, who would now be alone, and to take my cousin's place in the Customs service. And throughout all these years of patient waiting, we behaved ourselves outwardly in an exemplary fashion; we went to all the meetings, took part in all the campaigns, and killed as many sparrows and rats as the next man.

"But man proposes . . . After all those years of effort to get this involved plan moving, a new Party campaign was launched unexpectedly and upset everything. This was the plan for joint management of all private business and private property. In other words, the second run of the steam-roller which was to put paid for good and all to me and my class throughout China. Was it really worse than the Wu Fan of evil memory, or had I recovered a little of my pride and self-assurance during the intervening period of three years to make it seem so? In any case, I despised myself even more the second time than the first, and I ended by despising the whole human race."

"What on earth could they do to you more humiliating than your experiences during the five antis?"

"The processions through the streets. We were respectable merchants with our own dignity, and we had worked as hard as any labourer to bring up our children decently; and when the time came, we had taken part in the revolution led by Sun Yat-sen—and now we had to walk through the streets carrying posters in which we described ourselves as 'bourgeois counter-revolutionaries'. Waving these posters aloft we begged 'the people' to take away our possessions, and to suppress us 'as a class'; and we thanked the Communist Party for having helped us to wipe the capitalist stains off our consciences. Although, as I have said, I had seen to it that in recent years my conduct had been outwardly exemplary, I was forced to march with those who were regarded as the worst offenders. At the age of sixty-

five, with my honourable wrinkles and my venerable white hair, I, who had never done any harm to any of my fellow men, either rich or poor, was compelled to march through the streets with a placard on my back bearing the words—which I had been forced to write myself—‘I am a thief; I have stolen the property of the people, and I have no desire to reform!’ ”

Once again I tried to palliate Wang’s shame by finding him companions in misfortune: “I have been told that ordinary working men also had to endure such humiliations.”

“That’s true, in another period. The men who worked for foreign undertakings in Shanghai were three times as well paid as other workers. When the Communists came to power, you could see processions of these men marching through the streets carrying posters asking for their salaries to be reduced. And when, by the great benevolence of the Party, their request was complied with, they marched in procession through the streets to the Town Hall to thank the mayor.”

“I remember,” I said, “the story of a journalist who had noticed that there were no longer the usual prostitutes offering themselves for hire in Shanghai. Asking what had happened to them, and whether the police had arrested them all, he was told that they had all gone in a body to beg the authorities to put them away in reformatories where by honest labour they could recover their respectability.”

At this, for the first time, I saw a wan smile curl the lips of the merchant Wang. It was the first time throughout the story of his sufferings that he had been able to summon up such a thing.

“The Communist régime is not afraid of ridicule, it seems,” I said.

“Ridicule? That’s a word that doesn’t exist in the vocabulary of Communists. It has disappeared, like all other words which have their origin in the word ‘laughter’. From the point of view of the Communist Party those grotesque comedies have a sense: they are deliberately intended to rob us of all our human dignity, to force us from our human condition. Isn’t that the title of a book by Malraux? I read it in Chinese translation. He is a great writer of whom your country can be proud.”

“Thank you.”

Wang’s impassivity, which had been deeply impressive and dignified throughout the course of his tragic story, seemed to crumble for a moment; his shoulders drooped and his head bowed.

“As long as we seem to retain the slightest trace of human dignity, the Communists savagely do their utmost to extinguish it. They desire

that a man shall lose all honour and dignity to the point at which he would sooner slink away into his hole like a beaten dog. If he can be brought to the stage where he is no longer human, he will not have courage and vigour enough to be an enemy, and their system will roll on without let or hindrance."

I wanted to persuade Wang to return to the story of his own experiences, but it was like trying to model something in ash: it crumbled away in your fingers. All that remained of the once dignified merchant Wang was so tenuous that it threatened to disappear entirely through those gaps in his story which I myself tore open by my questions. Not for the first time I cursed my professional curiosity.

"How did it come about that this new campaign you mention upset all your plans?" I asked.

"Because it led to the confiscation of my business before the time had come for me to offer it voluntarily to the State in return for my transfer to Canton to be with my mother. Instead, I was given the job of manager in the business which had been mine. Then, my mother, who was already very old, and who had been very upset by all these terrible happenings, died when she heard of this new set-back to our plans. And now, at the age of sixty-five, I had to start working for others. 'For the people', as the Communist Party said, but the Chinese people around me were no better off than they had been before. No, I wasn't working for 'the people', but for the officials of the Communist Party; for the young devils who had turned my shop upside down and brought me into prison, for the police who had tormented me there, for the leading bureaucrats, and for the megalomania of Mao. . . ."

"The new class', as Djilas calls it," I put in.

At that Wang looked puzzled, and I could see that he had never heard of Djilas or his book, so I did not pursue the point.

"It was by such manoeuvres that the State seized the possessions of those who had any, their businesses, their houses, their land, their jewellery. In Shanghai alone the authorities collected five tons of gold. They even took the thin gold chains from the necks of small children. But the thing went on relentlessly, and the public farces were played out again. After my arrival in Hongkong I heard that, at the beginning of 1958, those former employers and business men who had been reduced to the position of managers under the joint-management scheme, had been forced to the final 'stage of rectification', as it was called. They all signed a collective appeal for the reduction of their salaries, and renounced the share of the profits they had been promised.

At the same time they publicly engaged themselves 'to obey the Party more strictly than before, and to carry out more conscientiously the plans for their personal reform'.¹

"In my job as paid manager of what had been my own business I was in a position to see at first hand how trade immediately declined once it was in the grip of the State. It was heart-breaking. Remember that they had broken us in order to make us confess to frauds we had never committed; and now we had to stand by and see them committing frauds at the expense of the customers that even the most dishonest of our colleagues would have baulked at! How else can you describe the sale of cotton goods that tore as soon as they were washed for the first time? Or the acceptance of deposits on goods that were never delivered? Or the sale of dried turnip-leaves as tea—and at the price of silk? It took just about three months of State control to clear the shelves and to turn our inventories into a mockery. They no longer reflected the stocks we actually had, but the figures of the distribution plan, which were pure fantasy. And our books were cooked, figures erased and others substituted to fit into the vagaries of the Party line. And it became dangerous to ask for the delivery of goods; they were simply not available because they had not yet been produced. If you did nevertheless it meant that you were maliciously suggesting that there was something wrong with the plan for the distribution of consumer goods. On the other hand, it was just as risky not to have them on the shelves when the inspectors came round. That meant provoking 'the people' to complain, and maliciously suggesting to them that the State was not properly looking after their requirements. So when you found the stock of any particular commodity running low, you stopped the sale of it in order to keep some on your shelves. Can you imagine a Chinese merchant behaving like that? But that's the state the Communist régime brought us to.

"And then the deliveries that did actually take place! They would send us padded winter clothing in July, and straw hats in December. But at least such goods could be sold at some time or other—which was not the case with many of the extraordinary goods we received. For example, one day Changsha was inundated with empty medicine chests. About a hundred thousand of them. Their contents, according to the lists we received, were: cough mixture, medicines against

¹ Li Wei-han, Director of the United Front Department of the Central Committee, announced this joyful news at a meeting of the Pan-China Federation of Commerce and Industry.

malaria, dysentery, skin and stomach complaints, and insect bites, together with clinical thermometers, lint, gauze and so on. But, as I said, they were empty. Those medicine chests were used as receptacles for all sorts of other things: vegetables, cosmetics, money, tools and so on. You see, the 'Plan' had provided for the production of one million of these medicine chests with medicaments intended for the use of the co-operative farms. But the price had been fixed at eighteen yuan; that is to say, far beyond the pocket of the average peasant. In consequence they could not be sold, and they hung around until finally their contents were stolen, or sold separately—and then the empty boxes ended up in batches all over the place.

"And then the quality of the stuff they sent us! It was terrible. You couldn't choose your stock any more; you just had to take what the co-operatives sent you, and do your best to sell it. The State could do exactly as it liked, because there was no competition. Sometimes, when I had to sell shoddy goods, I was afraid that my customers would throw them at me. But I needn't have worried; they would never have dared to do such a thing, because they knew perfectly well that they were in a State co-operative, and complaints would have been useless—and even dangerous. Of course, consumer goods had become so rare by this time that they were glad enough to get even the trash which was all I had, though I blushed to offer it to them. I wonder if you can understand my feelings? When you've spent all your life as a business man, doing your job to the best of your ability as though it were an art, looking after your customers, presenting your goods to the best advantage, keeping their quality as high as possible, then it's very terrible to end up as a salesman of Communist goods with Communist methods of buying and selling as sinister as their prisons. It is as though an antiquarian were compelled to run a junk shop."

"What happened to your personal plans whilst all this was going on?"

"The plans that had taken three years to arrange so carefully were in ruins. But, worse than that, my will power had suffered a terrible blow too. My tribulations now seemed beyond human endurance. The debasement of my professional standing coming on top of my personal humiliations seemed to have finished me. Not only had they robbed me of the fruits of my labour, but they had taken the salt out of my life. I was an empty shell, battered and dilapidated like a useless piece of lumber. I let myself be swept along by the stream of the new

flood-tide, far worse than any overflowing of the Yellow River—the Communist inundation.”

“All the same, here you are in Hongkong. How did that come about?”

“Things came to a head when my elder daughter joined the Communist Party, and that re-aroused my determination to leave the country. Poor girl, she did it only in order to keep her job at the government office in which she worked. She had taken it whilst I was in prison in order to get food for the children. But my younger daughter was unable to forgive her, and one evening she was even indiscreet enough to reproach her openly for having done so. After that my elder daughter treated the younger one as a counter-revolutionary. But my younger daughter was defiant. They quarrelled. ‘Go on,’ urged the younger one. ‘Don’t be afraid. Denounce me to the police then.’ It was a terrible thing for a man getting on in years to witness such a breach in his family. I did not blame either of them. They were good girls. My elder daughter had seven children to think of. Might she not, driven to desperation, really denounce her sister to the police one day? I could foresee the tragedy: an elder daughter denouncing the younger, and then the younger in prison. Was that to be the culmination of a long line of respectable ancestors? Could I, as a father, stand by and see the final break-up of my family?

“Fear lent me a last upsurge of energy and awakened unsuspected reserves of courage and determination. And at the same time it roused my younger daughter too. It was out of the question, of course, to escape illegally with eight small children. My younger daughter insisted that we should have to abandon her sister, who was drifting further and further away from us, and whom we could no longer trust. ‘Not more than three of us—if we can get to Canton—could risk escaping over the rocks at night to Hongkong. My boy is twelve now, and he is plucky and sensible.’ In fact, in those difficult circumstances the boy did all honour to his ancestors.

“Now Changsha is an important military base, and convoys of lorries with men and supplies go off every day to Canton and Tibet. When she was seventeen, my younger daughter had driven a lorry in the war against Japan, and it so happened that the formation to which she belonged ultimately went over to Mao. With the support of these two references she now laid siege to various departments with patience and persistence, talking the language of the Communists, pointing out that the people had just as hard a battle to fight now as they had

had formerly against Japan. She passed her conduct examination satisfactorily and in the end she was given charge of a lorry.

"She passed out excellently from a number of courses, and one Saturday morning she hid me and her son in the lorry. I had with me the only valuable I had been able to save from the wreck: an old ivory carving which had been handed down in my family for generations. The road-block controls already knew my daughter and her lorry and they let her pass without trouble. She drove like a madman, and my old bones were terribly jolted and buffeted, but we got to Canton in less than two days. And as soon as night fell, we set off at once towards the frontier, leaving the lorry by the side of the road and going on foot. My daughter had learnt the way by heart. That was just as well, because I was hopeless; I have never been able to understand a map, and, in addition, now I was greatly depressed at the break-up of my family. My decision to abandon my elder daughter with her children, whom I loved dearly, was the most terrible thing I had ever had to do, and my heart was heavy. We almost came to grief, because we were discovered by a frontier guard. That would have been the end of everything, including our lives, but fortunately the man, who was a little tipsy, showed himself appreciative of the piece of ivory carving I was able to offer him.

"That was where a life full of hard work, love of family and respect for neighbours had brought me: at night, on the rocky ground leading to Hongkong, three wrecks from the Communist storm-bought their lives from a drunken soldier with the last item they had saved from their ancestors. But there you are: he let us pass."

Those three words "There you are" echoed in my mind for a very long time. In them lay a concluding invitation to contemplate the whole cataclysm of his life: his emaciated body which was no more now than skin and bones, his heavy-lidded eyes which had seen his plans brought to nothing, his career destroyed and his family broken up.

"And now in my old age I am living on charity," he concluded. "After all those years of honest labour."

THE MOTHER OF A FAMILY

THERE was a surprise for me! I met a young Frenchwoman, a real one, who called a "casserole" a casserole, and knew how to fry chips. And yet for years she had eaten rice with chopsticks, and she had brought her children into a Chinese world. It was love, of course, that had been responsible for all this. Violette had lived in Paris, and there she had fallen in love with a waiter in a Chinese restaurant, and gone back with him to China where he had inherited a cottage and a patch of land. I was quite moved by the idea of receiving the willing and generous confidences of a compatriot, and I hoped that Violette would not be embarrassed, and perhaps even be comforted, by the idea of emptying her heart out to a fellow countrywoman.

As she was a refugee of European origin she received assistance from the relief organisation of the United Nations, and this would have allowed her to live reasonably, but she sent it back to China where her husband and their four children had remained behind. To keep herself she was working as a chambermaid in a Victoria hotel.



The pavements were crowded with pedestrians, some holding up umbrellas to protect their heads; noisy children, stalls, boxes, baskets, hawkers crouched in front of their little stalls selling ancient eggs, men mending chair bottoms, cobblers, repairers of broken china, boot blacks, vendors of corn plasters, newspaper sellers—all plying their trade in the open. On both sides of all the streets the shop fronts were hung with long vertical coloured signs painted with those marvellous ideographs which are the characters of the Chinese language. On the upper floors were further multicoloured banners hanging from windows and balconies, but these were clothes in all colours hung out to dry; and the extraordinary thing was that, far from making the streets look poverty-stricken and slummy, they lent them an air of gaiety. It looked as though the whole town was decorated for some

celebration. And, after all, was not that washing fluttering in the sun one of the most touching banners to the human condition?

★

Violette met me in the foyer of the hotel in which she was working. It was her day off and I needed no interpreter to talk to her, so Fung was not with me this time. Violette was a tall, pleasing brunette with a good figure, a healthy complexion and a thick mass of dark hair. Her smile, warm but a trifle uncertain, contrasted to some extent with the outward serenity of her appearance. Her first words, uttered in the beautiful and forthright tones of Poitou, were of the children she had had to leave behind. And the first thing she did was to show me a photograph: four little brown heads with almond eyes gathered together like puppies on their mother's lap. The mother was Violette, but a thin and emaciated Violette who looked much older than she did now. I expressed my astonishment.

She sighed. "That was due to the privations we had to endure under the new régime."

I looked at her again and then at the photograph. The contrast was striking. Her face was fuller and more attractive now, and that miracle had been accomplished merely by being able to eat as much as she needed. From her handbag she took letters she had received from two other Frenchwomen, mothers like herself, who had stayed behind in China. They too were desperate at being forced to abandon their children. One of them wrote:

"They want to expel me, but as they won't let me take my children I won't go. I told the commissars that in all the nine years I had been in China I had never done anything wrong, and that they hadn't the right to send me away without my children, particularly as they were still so young and needed me. . . . When you get back to Paris please go to see the godfather of my little girl Claudine. He lives in — Tell him what is happening in this unfortunate country and how we all have to live now."

In the end these unfortunate women were dragged away from their children and deported by force. Such barbarous deportations are carried out with foreign-born wives, because, in the eyes of Mao, marriage with a Chinese, and the birth of children, is not sufficient to make a woman worthy of the great honour of becoming "People's Chinese". Under Chiang Kai-shek it was different: then a foreign-

born woman married to a Chinese took her husband's nationality and enjoyed full citizen's rights. The difference is due to the fact that the new régime conducts such monstrously false propaganda concerning the Western democracies that it can no longer afford to tolerate Westerners within its frontiers as living witnesses to its lies. It therefore refuses to allow these foreign-born wives and mothers to stay on in the Communist paradise, but at the same time it will not allow them to take their children with them when they go. The new and ideal society is apparently being built on a growing mass of such acts of inhumanity.

Violette knew nothing whatever about politics. She had lived as the wife of a peasant in a remote corner of the province of Chekiang, three days' train journey from Shanghai. Her activities were confined to her household duties, looking after her children and weaving cotton. She had no real idea of the nature of the calamity which had descended on her. She did not realise that she was suffering simply because she was guilty of the crime of knowing what life was really like in the Free World. A Frenchwoman, even the simplest, living far away in some remote corner of a strange country, can always tell those around her that it is not true that people die of hunger on the streets of France, that it is not true that French workers are mishandled by their employers, that it is not true that French working women have to prostitute themselves to their employers. To have the hysterical lies of the new régime about the world outside its borders contradicted on the spot is too much to bear, and that is why Violette and others like her cannot be allowed to remain in the paradisaical fields of Communism. Mixed marriages in China have to be broken up in order that Mao's front of lies shall not be broken.

"Did you find it easy to get used to life in China, Violette?"

"Oh yes—except the writing, and I didn't even try to learn that. You know, the people in a Chinese village aren't all that different from the people in a village in Poitou. From what I had heard in France before I went to China I had the idea that the Chinese were formal, secretive and double-faced. But I found that wasn't true at all. They are simple people and they don't stand on ceremony. They like to laugh and drink, just like the people at home. And then they're . . . how shall I say it? They've got their heads screwed on the right way."

"They're practical, matter-of-fact people?"

"Yes, very much like our own people, in fact. . . ."

I agreed with Violette; it is a fact that the Chinese of all the people

of Asia are most like the French in character: they are hard-headed and not mystical. They are rationalist and epicurean.

"There's no pretence about them," went on Violette. "And as for religion, each man practises it in his own home. They're more considerate to their neighbours though; more than our people at home. It seems they get that from their Confucius. There's one big thing that's quite different though: they don't have any draught animals, and no cattle—and very few wheelbarrows. They have to carry everything, and they do it by hanging it from a pole they carry on one shoulder. When it's very heavy you have to take very small steps. I found it very tiring at first, but I got used to it; you just have to walk in a certain way. And my husband was very good to me; he never let me carry anything really heavy. In that way his stay in France had made him different, because generally speaking Chinese men aren't very gallant to their womenfolk. I don't mean they're unkind to their wives, but they aren't very considerate or attentive either. However, once I had learnt the language I settled down all right."

"To return to that photograph in which you looked so thin and undernourished; you said it was because of the privations you had to suffer under the new régime. Tell me about them."

"Well, we hadn't enough to eat. At the beginning of the revolution the Communists said they were going to distribute the land amongst the peasants so that in future each man would be able to work for himself and not to enrich some landowner. But in our village there weren't any landowners like that; everyone had his little plot of land, and that was all. But as for each man being able to work for himself, we soon learnt different. The kanpous [Violette used the same term to describe all the representatives of the State, the Party and the co-operatives, just as the other refugees did] soon came along and took away almost everything we produced. All they left us for the whole year was two hundred kilograms¹ of dried sweet potatoes and a hundred kilograms of rice per person. All the rest they took, paying ridiculous prices, but it was no use saying anything. The result was that we hadn't enough to eat every day. If you wanted to kill a pig you had to pay for a licence to slaughter it. The peasants didn't kill many pigs even if they were hungry because for one thing there wasn't enough food left to feed them properly, and, for another, if we did manage to fatten one up then it had to be sold to buy salt and clothes. This meant that we hardly ever ate meat at all."

¹ A kilogram is approximately 2.2 lb.

"Was that slaughter tax the only one you had to pay?"

"Good heavens, no; there were more taxes to pay than plagues in Egypt. You had to pay toll to go over certain bridges or along certain roads. And you even had to pay a tax on the firewood you collected in the mountains.²

"There were also taxes to be paid on the State stock you had to buy. The kanpous said it was all voluntary, but no one dared to refuse. And then there were the lottery tickets. The government ran the lottery and distributed a certain number of tickets for each district. To force us to buy them the kanpous used to hold public meetings, and in front of everyone else no one dared to refuse. But the really startling thing was that if you won anything you weren't allowed to have it. It was 'frozen' in the savings bank, the kanpous told us. A peasant in a near-by district, Shih Wan-kuo, won ten thousand People's Dollars, but when he went to the bank to get it they told him that it was down in his name, but was being reserved for the mobilisation."

"Was there a war then?"

At this naïve question Violette burst out laughing.

"No, the agricultural mobilisation. The Communists always talk in military terms. The least thing is called 'a battle'. And then you have to pay insurance premiums for sickness, accidents and fire. All these are paid in kind to the local co-operative. Then there are the patriotic savings banks."³

"But insurance payments, State loans, lottery tickets and savings accounts aren't exactly taxes," I objected.

"Not in France, they're not," she replied. "Of course not, as I remember. All such payments are voluntary there, but not in China. Everything is obligatory, and therefore it's the same thing as taxes, which you have to pay. In China there are peasants who have to borrow grain in order to sell it and be able to pay the money demanded from them for the 'patriotic savings-bank campaign'. An old peasant named Nu had to sell his pig to pay for the lottery tickets he had to buy."

As a matter of fact I had been shown an article in a Chinese Communist newspaper complaining of the obtuse peasants who "regarded

² The *Chang Chiang Jih Pao* of December 12, 1951, refers to "strange taxes" imposed in the north-eastern provinces: taxes on boats, on the collection of firewood in the mountains, stable and pigsty taxes, five per cent. on the sale of ducks, pigs, vegetables, bamboo, manure, and so on. It would seem that the Communists have not bestirred themselves to abolish such old customs.

³ The *Jen Min Jih Pao* of April 22, 1952, published a long article on these patriotic savings banks.

insurance premiums and savings deposits as taxes, and who mixed up taxes, voluntary contributions, savings deposits and insurance premiums, regarding them as four different ways in which the State extracted money from them".⁴

"We are told again and again that life for the Chinese peasants was much harder under Chiang Kai-shek," I said. "Is that true?"

Violette stared at me in astonishment, obviously at my ignorance.

"Under the old régime there were bad years and good years. But there *were* sometimes good years. Under the new régime all the years without exception are bad. For one thing, we didn't have to pay a tax before we could slaughter a pig. And for another, they didn't requisition everything at ridiculous prices. You could sell what you had on the market at normal prices. You could collect firewood freely, and you could sell it if you wanted to without having to pay taxes on it. Under the new régime everything belongs to the State and nothing to the peasant. Before the revolution my husband's brother was a landless labourer. He worked for people who did have land. He told us that in those years when there were no floods he always had enough to eat and drink. And there was always a little rice to spare for the passing beggar. Nowadays everyone's always short of rice."

"Another refugee told me that, at first, when the Communists arrived in a village, the peasants welcomed them because at least they imposed fixed taxes, and so the peasants knew just where they stood."

Violette was silent for a moment, obviously trying to think back, and not finding it easy. Like the peasant Fan Ling, they all found it difficult to think back to the days before the collectivisation of agriculture; their memories of those happy days had become vague and far away, like the memory of a previous life which had been submerged in the night of time by some violent trauma.

"Yes," she said finally, "I think there's some truth in that. Under the Kuomintang it did happen sometimes that tax collectors imposed all sorts of strange and unexpected taxes on us, so that we didn't know where we stood. That was upsetting. And it is true that for a while the Communists altered all that and restored some sort of order. But that's all different now. The kanpous descend on us poor people like ravening lions every so often. And what difference does it make to us if instead of taxes they call it loans, lottery tickets, savings or voluntary contributions? And in addition there's one other thing we didn't have before—compulsory requisitions. Perhaps the worst part of it all is that

⁴ *Chang Chiang Jih Pao*, October 4, 1951.

they invent new theories for everything they do. For example, as a result of agricultural reform some tenant farmers were given their land. Naturally they were overjoyed because they thought that now they wouldn't have to pay rent any longer. But then the Communists came along with a theory which said that in future they would have to pay rent just the same, only to the State. So how much better off were they?"

What Violette had to say reminded me of a cutting I had read from the Peking *People's Daily* of July 29, 1957, denouncing a former landowner in Hsien Chanon⁵ because he had reminded the peasants that before the revolution they had paid only fifty tans⁶ of grain in rent for their land, whereas now they had to pay a hundred (including taxes and deliveries). This, complained the *People's Daily*, was a typical counter-revolutionary slander. But the assertions of the former landowner were confirmed by what Violette said, and also by an orthodox Communist, Chien Chia-chu, who writes in his book *The Principles of New Public Finance*: "Rent is what the peasant-farmer pays to the landowner for the use of his land. Tax is what the landowner pays to the State on his land. Since the Communist revolution, rent and tax have been merged. Now that landed proprietors have been abolished and their role taken over by the State, the public grain levy must therefore represent the total of the rent and the land tax together." It would be very difficult to find more convincing proof that the expropriation of landed proprietors in China was not carried out on behalf of the peasantry, but in the interests of the Communist bureaucracy.

One way or the other, these realistic observations of the orthodox Communist financier Chien Chia-chu fully confirmed what the non-political Violette had to say on the point, and what the very daring "counter-revolutionary" in Chanon had said. Let us suppose that a tenant farmer produced one hundred kilograms of soya from his land before the revolution. He gave fifty of it to his landowner as rent and kept the remaining fifty for himself. The landowner paid, say, twenty to the State in the form of land tax—or its equivalent. But since the Communist revolution the tenant farmer, now become a peasant farmer, must pay fifty to the State corresponding to his previous rent, and on top of that another twenty, corresponding to the land tax previously paid by the landowner, or seventy kilograms in all. In other words, he pays tax twice on the produce of his toil; the first tax

⁵ Hsien, a sort of sub-district.

⁶ One tan is 60.45 kilograms.

in the form of rent for his land, and the second in the form of a tax on revenue, something which was justifiable in the case of the land-owner, because, in fact, the rent did represent an income for him, but not justifiable at all in the case of the peasant, because for him the rent represents a disbursement and not a revenue. Obviously, in order to see the justice of this double imposition you have to rise to dialectical spheres of economic thought.

However, since then the People's Communes have come into being and all these fiscal considerations are out of date. Nowadays, the State—after having fed and clothed its slaves—takes the lot, which certainly simplifies economic theory and makes it unnecessary for finance dialecticians like Chien Chia-chu to rack their brains any longer. But Violette was continuing her comparisons:

"Before the revolution you had the right to weave your own cotton, and with it you could make good, solid and hard-wearing garments for your children. Today cotton is rationed and you can't get more than a kilogram per person, which means that you have to buy linen and ready-made clothes. That's very expensive, and I don't know what the things are made of, for they don't keep the children warm in winter and they tear almost immediately.⁷ And on top of all this the secretary of the Party, who was taking us in a course, urged us to cut down our consumption of clothing! 'How can we do that?' a peasant asked him. 'We've only got cotton clothes, and we've had them for at least three years already.' And then the secretary told us that we would have to make them do for nine years: three years as new, another three years as worn; and the final three years as mended."

Violette was quite indignant with the man, and believed that he was particularly brutal, but, as I knew, he was merely carrying out the general instructions which you can find set out in detail in the *Jen Min Jih Pao* of April 21, 1957. Violette then followed up all this by telling me to my stupefaction that throughout their lives her children had never known dairy produce in their nourishment. As a matter of fact this sort of thing was not astonishing even under the old régime, because there is no pasture land and there are very few cows in China; all the land is used to produce yields of greater calorific value than the grass-meat circuit, namely rice and wheat.

⁷ It is a fact that the Chinese Communist press is full of complaints about the poor quality of the goods produced. Out of 430 different products tested, 86 were found to be defective, and in particular tinned goods, wine, knitted goods, cotton goods, woollen goods and dairy products. *Ta Kung Pao*, November 28, 1957.

"But if you never had meat or dairy produce, and not even enough rice, how did you live?" I inquired.

"We lived on sweet potatoes, soya, soya juice, vegetables and dried fish. If only we had had enough of it! And if only we had always received the monthly rations to which we were entitled! 160 grams⁸ of oil, 80 grams of sugar, and 300 grams of meat. The most difficult thing was to get hold of the salt necessary to keep the food. The Communist kanpous put so heavy a tax on it that we had to work for days to be able to get what we needed."

"In other words," I interjected, "in order to get money into his treasury, Mao has re-introduced the old medieval salt tax. But we are assured that at least Mao has one thing to his credit: he has warded off the periods of famine which have racked China from time to time for thousands of years."

"Who told you that there were no longer famines in China?"

"Those people who were invited to come to China by Mao on tours of inspection. That was one of the many things they told us when they came back."

"I'm quite sure he didn't let them go short whilst they were in China, but for all that there are still famines—the only thing is that the newspapers don't write so much about them as they used to. People in France can have no idea of what a famine means. My husband's uncle worked in Kiangsu, and he told us that as a result of the floods 200,000 homeless people sought refuge in Hsuechow, Pukou and Shanghai, but the kanpous forced them to return to their villages. That was in the winter of 1956-7. But when they got back to their villages the refugees had nothing to eat. So they chewed the bark of trees, and ate roots and earth. Uncle told us that over 100,000 peasants died of starvation or of stomach troubles caused by eating earth. And in Shanghai he met other refugees from Kwantung and Kwangsi, and they showed him newspapers from Canton and Nanking in which you could read in black and white that in their regions ten million peasants had suffered from the famine in the terrible winter of 1954.

"When I was deported from China I was sent from Shanghai, and I spent the night in the waiting-room there with my guard, and there I got talking to two peasants from group nine of the Red Star co-operative in the Yinchang area to the north of the province of Kweichow. My guard was asleep, and as they knew that I was in custody they trusted me, and they told me in an undertone that all

⁸ One gram is 1/1000 of a kilogram, which is approximately 2.2 lb.

their group had deserted the co-operative to go into the mountains to pick roots and mushrooms in order to have something to eat. They said that in their area there was a famine every spring."

"Didn't they get assistance from the big towns?"

"It takes months before that arrives, and hungry stomachs won't wait that long. All the kanpous could think of was holding meetings. Those peasants told me that at one of these meetings the peasants were divided into three groups: those who had a little rice but no money; those who had a little money but no rice; and those who had neither rice nor money. The first group was told to eat its rice, the second group was told to buy turnips with its money, and the third group was told to ask the others for help. And they had to hold a meeting for that!"

Communist propaganda has so dulled the minds of people abroad that many of them are frankly incredulous in face of the mass of evidence that I have brought back on the existence of famine in China under Mao. Some people are prepared to admit that the régime is often cruel and ruthless, but they are quite unable to believe that it has not improved the situation of the Chinese people materially. They feel that there must be some compensation for all the ruthless cruelty, and that in exchange for their liberty the Chinese people must at least have obtained material security. The "historical process" simply must contain some progressive element, they think, otherwise it wouldn't be an historical process at all. And as for Violette—well, she's just an embittered person who can't see straight; understandable perhaps, because she has lost her children. But just because she happens to have lived in China she mustn't think she can turn everything upside down we know about the way the Chinese people live under Mao.

However, the truth does not rely on Violette's evidence alone, or on that of the peasant Fan Ling and the other refugees; there are numerous official statements which confirm it too. Official statements? But then what about the censorship? It is quite true, of course, that you don't find these official statements amongst the tremendous volume of propaganda carefully prepared for foreign consumption, but if you care to take the trouble to explore a little behind the painted scene, you will find the truth about many things in internal business or routine reports which cannot be entirely falsified, if only for technical reasons. It is there, behind the scenes, in the deep fabric of the system, where the swallows of Communist propaganda never penetrate, that you will find revealing documentation.

Let us start with an important figure: in 1957 the Chinese Communist Government announced that the total production of rice was 82,000,000 tons. This figure was published in all the Chinese newspapers. Good, but how many people took the trouble to divide 82,000,000 tons by 600,000,000, the total population of China for whom this rice production was intended? And then to divide the result by 365, which is the number of days in a year, even in a Communist State. To satisfy any curiosity, the amount of rice per day per head of the population comes to 370 grams. But even that does not give you an accurate idea, because some of the rice has to be put aside for the next year's sowings, and, in addition, the Communist officials and agents, and the soldiers, have a rice ration which is very much superior to that of the ordinary civilian. In consequence you come to a daily ration of about 320 grams, which is the figure quoted by all refugees; and that means about half the normal daily calorific requirement of a human being.

Let us now go a little further and place on record the fact that in 1936, when there were about 150,000,000 less mouths to feed, and there was not the heavy burden of a tremendous and voracious bureaucracy, the year's production of rice was approximately the same; which makes it easy to understand how it is that the refugees insist that they were materially better off before the Communist revolution. Let us also note that the yield of grain in China at present is one of the lowest in the world, about a third that of France, for example. On December 7, 1957, the Chinese Vice-Premier Li Fu-chun declared at the Chinese Trade Union Congress: "Our agriculture is terribly backward and does not meet the food requirements of our people." There are also numerous indications in documents intended for internal consumption that the crops are poorly harvested, that there is constant trouble with the use of manure, that the tractors turned out by the national factories have an average working life of not more than a week. In a speech delivered on June 26, 1957, to the Chinese National Assembly, no less an authority than Chou En-lai admitted frankly that "fifteen per cent. of our peasants are short of food". He then went on to calculate that the net revenue of each peasant in the Kolkhozes was seventy yuans a year, which makes about three hundred yuans per family, that is to say roughly £3 10s. or 7 dollars in purchasing power per month.

As for the persistence of famine, the truth of this is vouched for in periodical reports broadcast by the Chinese radio. A broadcast from Peking in August 1955 reported difficulties in supplying the urban

population with grain owing to the influx of hungry peasants from the areas affected by famine. On May 14, 1954, Shanghai radio broadcast a report that 50,000 peasants had been sent back to their villages from Shanghai, into which they had poured as a result of food shortage. Today official economic circles in Peking admit frankly that 1954 was a very difficult year owing to various natural calamities, such as drought, followed by locusts, followed by floods. And, though they don't mention it, owing all the time to the calamities artificially imposed on the countryside by Communist bureaucracy, which were worse than all the others put together. It is also admitted that 1955 was not much better, and that in 1956 and 1957 there was famine in certain districts.

I thought it was advisable to make that digression in recording Violette's testimony, because as a mother of a family uninfluenced by any particular ideology her main interest was always to get enough to eat for her children. Even now, when that was no longer the case, the very mention of such problems as rationing, shortage and anything connected with the larder aroused her lively interest almost as though she had to provide the evening meal for her quiverful. However, I felt that I had already heard the gist of her experience on this particular subject and I was anxious to get on to another one which fascinated me: the collectivisation of agriculture as seen from the point of view of someone who had been collectivised.

"How was the collectivisation of agriculture carried out in your village, Violette?"

Her face darkened at once and she produced a coloured handkerchief and blew her nose as a sort of preventive measure against the danger of tears.

"Don't talk of that, Madame," she replied. "It was a terrible misfortune for us all. For some time previously we had heard rumours that the kanpous had visited neighbouring villages and confiscated the chickens and the domestic pots and pans,⁹ that all the young people had been enrolled in a guard, that kanpous who had come specially from the towns were up to some mischief with those on the spot, and that a lorryload of soldiers had been seen on its way up to our village. Something threatening was obviously brewing, and we lived in a

⁹ It was only later, at the time the People's Communes were established, that domestic pots and pans and so on were requisitioned. This was obviously one of those baseless rumours which are inevitable in the shadow of the censorship when great events are afoot.

state of constant anxiety. One morning at dawn we were woken up by heavy knocking on our door—a threatening sort of sound. The police had never had any occasion to come to us, but my husband and I looked at each other: we knew it was the police. My heart began to beat hard, and when we opened the door three kanpous came in, one of whom we had never seen before. They told us that the peasants had decided to put all their land into a common pool and to till it in common in the future. We were to come to the village square at eight o'clock that morning, bringing our pig, our wheelbarrow, our spades and our papers.

“We dressed in fear and trembling whilst one of the kanpous searched the place and made a sketch of the surroundings. When the kanpous had gone, we tried to hide as much as we could of our few possessions, the camera we had brought with us from France, and with which we took the photograph I showed you just now, our plates, the bedclothes I had also brought from France in order to have the kind of bed I was used to. Then I went out to talk to our neighbours. They were as upset as we were. One of them had a paralytic grandfather in one corner, and the old man was groaning. The peasants went from one hut to the other through the back-yards, talking anxiously in low tones about what was going to happen. The father of one of our neighbours no longer moved; he seemed to have been petrified by the shock, and he was stiff and motionless as though he were dead. There was also a young man of nineteen, and the Communists had turned his head. He was going from house to house shouting that Socialism had arrived, and upsetting everyone even more than before. At the same time he was poking his nose into everything, because everyone was trying to hide the little possessions they prized most, or give them to someone else to look after. We had been told to leave our doors open all the time so that the kanpous could go in and out whenever they pleased. The children were told to watch out for the kanpous in order to give their parents time to hide their things, but the kanpous came round and collected all the children and sent them off to school earlier than usual. We were indignant, we muttered angrily amongst ourselves, and we sighed; but what could we do? We were helpless against the kanpous in their lorry. Soon there were many strange kanpous we had never seen before, and they went everywhere urging us to make haste.

“By nine o'clock everyone was assembled on the village square. Some of them feared that they would never see their homes again, and

some of the old women were crying. Then the Party Secretary addressed us and told us that we were now going to give all our land to the co-operative. We stood there silently and listened to him with sinking hearts. After the hurly-burly of the early morning everything was quiet now, and our hearts were heavy with sorrow. No one moved. Then guards went round and took away all our papers."

"When you say papers, do you mean the title deeds of your land?"

"Yes. They're even more complicated than in France. There were some peasants who didn't want to part with them, but they were so bullied and browbeaten that they had no alternative. Then the guards made a second tour round collecting all the livestock and the tools. When that was done a tall thin kanpou told us that we should all be given shares in the co-operative according to what we had put in. Then they handed round other papers, but we hadn't the heart to try to read them. Everyone was still standing there silently as though struck dumb by what had happened; only the kanpous were rushing around busily. Then a woman member of the Communist Party made us a speech followed by speeches from two Young Communists. I can't tell you what they said; I was too sick and upset. Finally the mayor told us we had to elect a president of the co-operative, a secretary and three brigadiers. But they were already there waiting for us to elect them. They were men from the town we had never seen before, except one of the brigadiers, who was that son of one of our neighbours I told you about and a Communist activist. His father looked at him for a long time, and then he said in a loud voice: 'So you've joined them to rob your father!' We were horrified, and the guards seized him at once and took him away. Later on he was publicly tried. But in the meantime we had to elect the five gentlemen, and everyone raised his hand, and with that it was over. Then we were allowed to go home, and behind our own doors we wept. But I was at least a little comforted at the thought that they had not taken away our few things after all: our camera, our plates and our bedclothes. At midday they came to fetch my husband who had to go out and work with a group of other peasants under the orders of one of the brigadiers. That was a hard thing for him, because he had given up his job as a waiter in a Paris restaurant in order to go home to his own little plot and work for himself instead of working for other people, but there was nothing we could do about it. And that's how we joined the Communist collective farm."

"And what was life like after that?"

"They left us the house, the chicken and the little patch of ground round the house, but they kept the pig. My husband now had to work even harder than before; and before long they made the women go out into the fields too. They explained that it would be very backward to leave the women at home. Now why's that? I ask you! So we had only the evening in which to cultivate our own little patch round the house. I think it was when I was working with the women and saw everything they had to put up with that they began to wish I would go. They were ashamed for a foreigner to see it."

I could not altogether suppress a smile. "I think the truth was rather that you embarrassed the Communists because you were able to tell the Chinese peasants what things were like abroad."

"Now you may be right there. I remember one day we all had to attend a course, and there was a young kanpou who had just about learned to blow his own nose, and he told us with all the assurance of a priest telling us about the good God that in France the police went into the fields to watch the harvest and count the yield. That made me and my husband feel sick, because the only police we had ever seen in a harvest field were the friends of that young kanpou in Communist China. But we didn't dare to say anything, because since the collectivisation we were watched much more strictly than before. The brigadier was watching his group all the time, and at the end of the day he gave each one his points in his book, and at the end of the year they were added up to find out how much you had earned. And when he distributed the points the brigadier allowed for your willingness and enthusiasm. Our brigadier was the young chap I told you about who was a Communist activist, and whose father they had taken away. No one spoke to him any longer. He decided the points for all the old friends of his father too, men who could have been his uncles.

"You know, Madame, you'd hardly believe how harsh the Communists are to us poor people. They don't bother their heads about a thing except the 'yield'; our yield, not theirs. Nothing else matters for them; not our empty stomachs, not our worn clothes, not our tiredness nor our troubles. With the one exception the new bosses were all strangers from the town. They despised us, and they only punished us."

"Punished you? How did they do that, Violette?"

"Fines, the withholding of earned points, and public trials. I travelled from Shanghai to Canton with a peasant from a village in

Kangtsu, and he told me about another peasant named Chou Te-chin who squabbled with his brigadier because this brigadier didn't give them their points properly. This Chou appealed to the president of the co-operative, but instead of listening to his complaint this man denounced him for 'taking the side of the rich'. Chou, it appears, was deeply shocked at this reception of his complaint and terribly afraid they would now regard him as a 'political suspect', so he hanged himself."

Since my interrogation of the peasant Fan Ling, whose evidence had been so sadly like that which Violette was now giving me, I had obtained a copy of the *Regulations of Collective Agricultural Production*, dated November 11, 1955, and drawn up by no less august a person than Mao Tse-tung himself. Behind all its legalised jargon, it confirms point by point what the refugees themselves say. For example, Article 7 declares that "the essential function of the common-land co-operatives is to fulfil their agricultural obligations towards the State and to reinforce the labour discipline of the peasants on the model of that of industrial workers. . . . The Kolkhoze [I use this Russian and now well-known expression for the sake of brevity] must serve the State by prompt payment of taxes, by selling the State agricultural produce according to the stipulations of the State Plan; by carrying out their work according to the norms laid down by the State; and by making their purchases exclusively through the public corporations according to the commercial practice laid down by the State." Articles 43 to 49 describe in exhaustive detail the system of labour brigades, the system of payment by piece-work, and the discipline imposed, which includes, amongst other things, "no absence from work without written justification; immediate obedience to all orders; individual responsibility for the quality of labour", and so on.

The fact that these regulations are enforced to the letter, as Violette complained so bitterly, is confirmed by the official *People's Daily* of Peking which writes: "It is obvious that the co-operatives will go from bad to worse if their members are being constantly punished," which is sufficient indication that they are punished. And again: "The cadres say to themselves: 'Now the land has been collectivised the peasants are in our hands and they must do what we want them to do.' And the cadres decide on their own quite arbitrarily."¹⁰ Referring to Yen-an it writes: "The cadres of the co-operatives have only one

¹⁰ *People's Daily*, June 27, and July 16, 1956.

method: threats, punishments, the deduction of points, accusations, and charges before the courts.”¹¹

“And that’s not all,” Violette went on. “We became entitled to the amount represented by our points only after the co-operative had fulfilled its three obligations to the State: the payment of taxes, the fulfilment of deliveries, and the accumulation of reserves, including the salaries of the kanpous. But who knew how much all that meant? We certainly didn’t. They drew up their figures on their own in their offices, and they did it to suit themselves. They made us keep our noses to the grindstone, saying that the socialist State required big deliveries; but they weren’t really as big as they said, and they kept the difference for themselves. Before long there was as big a Black Market as there ever had been, but this time, instead of putting a little into the pockets of the peasants, it all went into the pockets of the kanpous. But, as we used to say in Poitou: like master, like man. Seeing the kanpous swindling them, the peasants couldn’t resist stealing the grain when they got the chance.”

On this point too, what Violette had to say was amply confirmed by the revelations of the bouts of “self-criticism”. For example, on November 5, 1957, the *People’s Daily* spoke quite frankly of the Black Market formed by the Kolkhoze leaders with agricultural products. It appears that both they and the factory chiefs get up to the same sort of trick: the former misappropriate the produce of the Kolkhozes, and the latter enrich themselves by not paying out wages fully. The *Sian Daily* of August 2, 1958, reported that “the cadres of forty-six Kolkhozes in the district of Weiyang had conspired to rob the government and the peasants of 90,000 kilos of grain”. The same thing was reported concerning nineteen Kolkhozes in the district of Tapaying. “When the harvest is good,” writes this newspaper, “the cadres conspire together to put a little to one side without showing it in the books.” These cadres are, it must be remembered, Communist élite sent into the countryside from the towns to carry through the noble reform. . . .

“But apart from all those vexations, I take it that at least in that remote and mountainous part of China where you lived you were not greatly troubled by that vast mass of propaganda and those mental inquisitions from which the people in the big towns suffer?” I suggested.

“Do you think so? Well, let me tell you: if there was one respect in which things changed by comparison with the old régime, it was in

¹¹ *Information Agency of New China*, September 29, 1956.

the matter of personal freedom. Under the old régime I should never have been expelled and separated from my children. And, another thing, we could travel all over China wherever we wished, whereas in present-day China you mustn't go more than about thirty miles away from where you live. If you want to go farther, you have to get special permission. And it takes weeks. The kanpous ask you hundreds of questions, and in the end you don't get permission. But you've come under suspicion for wanting to go. The result is that people keep quiet and don't ask for anything. But you can't keep yourself to yourself, because the kanpous hold political lectures and courses, and everyone has to attend them whether he likes it or not. Just think of it, lessons in politics at my age! As though I hadn't got something better to do. The children also had to go to political lectures, and after that we didn't dare speak freely in front of them. And that's typical nowadays: everyone speaks with bated breath, because 'walls have ears'. If you didn't take good care what you said and who you said it to you might find it repeated to the police; and then you were in trouble."

"When you say 'walls have ears', do you mean that seriously?"

"Yes, I do. There was an old woman in our village, and her two sons were taken away for the war in Korea. She was very upset about it, and she used to cry silently into her apron. One day a neighbour said to his wife: 'When she gets the news that they've both been killed will be time enough to cry.' Now someone must have heard that through the door or something, because the police got wind of it, and the next day the man was summoned to explain himself. At first he denied saying anything of the sort, but they questioned him for days and days, and in the end he broke down and admitted that he had said it. He was then sent away to a camp and we never saw him again."

"Tell me, Violette, does that sort of thing go on all over China?"

"I don't know. I don't read the newspapers, and I can only tell you about what happened in our own small village. Once the new régime was firmly established, there were a lot of executions and deportations. Afterwards there were fewer, but the people were more and more frightened."

"Why should they have been more frightened if there were fewer executions and deportations?"

"Well, you see: at first we were told that it was only people in categories one and two who were to be punished. . . ."

"Categories one and two?"

"Yes. Haven't you heard that the kanpous divided us all up into five categories? The lazy capitalists, the working capitalists, the rich peasants, the poor peasants and the very poor peasants. There was a sixth category too: those who worked as peasants but who had been deprived for five years of the title of peasant as a punishment. Now we were told that only the first two categories would be punished, and as they were rich people we didn't think it was any concern of ours; and in any case we thought it was fair enough that their turn should come round to suffer a few of the hardships of life. My husband and I had brought a few savings from France with us, but because of the revolution our money wasn't worth anything any more. That sounds sad, doesn't it? But I can't tell you the number of times my husband said to me: 'How lucky we are to have lost all our savings! If we still had them, they would have put us in the category of working capitalists, and then we might have been liquidated.'"

"What did your savings amount to then?"

"About 240 heavy francs,¹² but fortunately we hadn't got them any more, so we thought we were all right; but it wasn't long before people belonging to the third and the fourth, and even the fifth, categories were summoned to the police, interrogated endlessly and then sent away to a camp; and often for next to nothing, because they hadn't paid their taxes, because they hadn't made some declaration or other, because they had failed to attend a meeting, because someone had overheard them speaking disrespectfully of the kanpous, or for no reason at all that anyone could find out. Then you can imagine that we were all frightened, because we realised that not even the poorest of the poor was safe any more. And that plays on your nerves. Everyone lives in constant fear nowadays; fear that the kanpous might suddenly put you in one of the four classes of counter-revolutionary peasants."

"That's something new, 'the four classes of counter-revolutionary peasants'; what's that exactly?"

"You see, they've divided everything up into classes; the people, the things and the possessions. The peasants were muttering that before long they'd classify the pigs. For example, in our political classes they told us that there were five class struggles, three phases of tactics, three antis, five antis, the five anti-antis . . ."

What Violette was saying recalled what the bank clerk Chang had

¹² Rather less than £18 or 50 dollars.

complained of. To check what I had been told I now asked Violette: "Can you tell me a little more about all those antis?"

"I'm afraid I could never get them all into my head, Madame. I had all I could do to learn the Seven Capital Sins off by heart. All I really knew and all I was interested in was that I had four children to feed. That was the only figure that mattered to me."

"From what you tell me it seems that pretty well everyone, rich and poor alike, was discontented with the régime. How did it manage to carry on, then?"

"The young people. The youngsters were carried away. They were bombarded with propaganda and they believed what they were told, all of it. After all, they were too young to have known anything different and to be able to compare. They were told that before the revolution there had been much greater misery and poverty. That wasn't true, but they believed it. Then all sorts of promises were made to them, and they weren't old enough to know how much the promises of governments are worth. The kanpous told them that in fifteen years' time there would be railways and they would have motor-cars. They might have asked themselves what good that would do them seeing that they were not allowed to move around, but they didn't; and they were enthusiastic at the idea. Their mothers would sooner have had less promised to them in fifteen years' time and a bit more on their plates at the moment, but it was different with the youngsters; they swallowed it all.

"And, of course, most of the kanpous were young too; and they had every reason to be satisfied with the régime; they lacked nothing. They were well dressed, well fed, and they could order the rest of us around. Of course, in time some of them began to think differently. There was my own son, for example; he was fifteen, and he was in favour of the Communist régime because of the way he had been taught at school. But by the time I had to leave China he had begun to think differently and to resent the régime. And that wasn't because he heard me complaining—I should have been too frightened to complain in the presence of a child. No, it was simply because he could see with his own eyes the terrible difficulties my husband and I had to provide him and his brothers with what they needed."

"A different point: those public accusations and trials I have heard so much about; can you tell me anything about the ones you saw with your own eyes?"

"I shall never forget the first time I was forced to be present at

one. Three men in our village, one of whom had just come out of prison where he had served a sentence for some offence or other, one of my husband's cousins, and his father, who was eighty, had to appear in public to make their *mea culpa*. The three stood on a platform, their arms to their sides, their heads lowered, facing all the villagers drawn up in front of them. Between them there was a line of kanpous armed with rifles. Then one after the other they had to confess all the sins they could possibly have committed since their birth, rebuking themselves all the time as wretched blackguards unworthy of the people. I felt my stomach turn over. The mother of one of the three was there too, listening to her son debasing himself. The same thing was organised by the kanpous perhaps half-a-dozen times in the next six months, but after that there were several years without any public trial.

"But then, after the collectivisation, the thing started up again, and the last one I witnessed was the worst of all, and the victim was that neighbour I told you about who had openly rebuked his son for joining the Communists. He was one of the most respected old men in the village, but that didn't make any difference; he had to stand there and tell us all that he was the dirtiest swine imaginable. He had become so thin and emaciated in their hands that he was hardly recognisable. And the most terrible thing of all was that we, his old friends, who knew and liked him, had to shout insults at him in public, because if we hadn't they would have arrested us too.

"Ah, Madame, just to think about it again upsets me. All those things I've told you about our lives make me feel depressed and want to cry again. I tell you, Madame, I've gone through terrible things. And my poor husband, a decent, kindly man, is still there, and my children too. You write books, Madame, can't you do anything to help me get my children back? What would it matter to Mao if he had a peasant or two less amongst all those six hundred millions?"

II

THE FORMER YOUNG COMMUNIST LEI

THIS time I did not have to visit a refugee camp, because the refugee I wanted to question, Lei, had found himself a regular job and was able to share a room in Hongkong. "He's the sort of chap who always falls butter side up," Fung, my interpreter, confided. "He found his feet at once. But then he's got charm. Everyone likes him; not only the ladies, but also his comrades and everyone he comes into contact with, from his boss to his washerwoman."

Lei shared a room with a ladies' tailor, who sat there cross-legged and made those very attractive robes which Chinese girls have worn from time immemorial—with a high collar as strict and formal as any officer's, but from the thigh downwards a slit which reveals their femininity. The Chinese are, of course, born business men, and I need hardly say that I didn't get away from that interview with Lei without his rooming companion having persuaded me to let him make one of those robes for me too. Not that it cost me a great deal: about £2 2s., including embroidery! I complimented the tailor on his excellent workmanship and he preened visibly.

"It's very beautiful," I went on, "but I really don't know when I shall ever be able to wear it."

"When you go to Peking to drink to the overthrow of the Communists," he said, and he accompanied his words with such expressive mimicry that I did not need the services of Fung to explain what he had said.

However, I am not writing this book to talk about women's clothes, no matter how beautiful, so let us get on to my talk with Lei. I thought he looked about thirty, but he could easily have been ten years older; you can never tell with these Orientals. There was a certain elegance in his appearance despite his simple clothes. In manner he was amiable and frank, with an inoffensive familiarity which immediately put you at your ease, almost as though you had known him for a long time. It was when he spoke that I could see what Fung meant about

his charm; it even penetrated through our lack of understanding of each other's languages. He showed strong, white and healthy teeth between humorous lips while at the same time his eyes were soft and gentle. But behind that rather light-hearted, even perhaps a trifle cynical, mask he did not lack sincerity. That was clear as soon as he stopped trying to impress me with his personality and became confidential.

★

"What is it you want of me, Madame?"

"First of all your own story; briefly, of course. After that I should like to ask you a number of perhaps indiscreet questions about the Communist régime, and about the state of mind of its cadres, because I know that you rose quite high in the pyramid. May I?"

"Ask me any questions you like, and if one of them should happen to embarrass me I shall pretend that I haven't heard it and you can go on to the next one on the list. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

I was sitting on the only *khan* in the room. The ladies' tailor, whose needle was going backwards and forwards like a shuttle, had withdrawn as far as possible into his corner in order not to disturb us. Lei remained standing, and he walked up and down, though occasionally he sat on one corner of a white table. The table was bare, the tiled floor was bare, and the whitewashed walls were bare. But that wonderful Utrillo of mine was still visible through the window.

"When China fell into Communist hands," Lei began, "I was twenty-three years old. I was in good health and a lively young fellow, and I had already collected quite a sheaf of honours as a bursary at Swatow College and the University of Changchun. And, of course, I had progressive ideas. My father had been killed by the cavalry of Chang Tso-lin,¹ and my mother had to bring me up on her own; in order to keep me and give me a good education, she became an embroideress. My ideas and my parents were my principal trumps in the career which opened up to me under the new régime. My father was a victim of feudalism, my mother worked for her living, and I had all the right kind of books in my library—Marx and Mao, for example.

¹ Chang Tso-lin was one of the most famous of the War Lords in China; for a long time he dominated Northern China, where he established a kind of royal court. He successfully resisted the attacks of the Kuomintang armies under Chiang Kai-shek and he died undefeated. It was his son, who succeeded him, who was finally defeated and driven out by Chiang Kai-shek's army.

That was quite enough for the Communist recruiters to regard me a likely young man for their purposes. They sent me one of their most persuasive proselytisers, a certain Wang Tse, a tall, spare man with gleaming eyes, who was perhaps six years my senior, and whose one pleasure in life was to mould young men to his ideas and put them through the Communist sausage machine, turning individuals into uniform molecules with a Maoist veneer.

"He was my mentor for about a year, and then I was sent to a special training school for Communist cadres in Shanghai. When I arrived there I was not a little surprised to find five hundred other young fellows all very much like myself, all of good family—good for propaganda, of course—all well educated, and all with the proper ideological tendencies. The Communists are past masters at the art of discovering those elements of the population which can best serve their purpose. In that school we went through an intensive training in all matters of special importance to Communism, and in foreign languages. In particular we were taught Russian and English: Russian because it was the language of our 'great brothers', and English because it was 'the weapon of re-conquest'. We were told that English had spread all over the world in the wake of British imperialism, and that we must master it in order to reconquer the world from imperialism."

"Excuse my interrupting you, but is a knowledge of English widespread in China?"

"No, only business men and those intellectuals who studied before the revolution spoke it. Since the revolution the Communists have confined its teaching to their own future cadres."

"That explains why, amongst those refugees who have held high positions under the new régime, so many speak English. But go on, please."

"Very well. In that cadre school I was stuffed with Marxism, Leninism and Stalinism. But at twenty-three your stomach will digest anything. I very soon learnt the phraseology together with the necessary number of quotations from 'the great driver of the locomotive of history',² to attribute to Mao or Stalin all the ideas I had fished up from Lenin, Sun Yat-sen, or Lao Tse, to find the 'Marxist explanation' for no matter what orders of the Party, to recognise the enemies of the people by their intonations, etc. I have always had a ready capacity to learn; not that I am particularly intelligent; I think it is just that my brain offers no resistance to whatever is crammed into it.

² Name given to Stalin by his Soviet adulators.

"After a year I was placed in charge of a district on behalf of the Communist Youth, an organisation of which I remained a member until I left the country. By that time I was beyond the normal age for it, of course, but Communism doesn't bother about such a minor matter as a date of birth. You're always the age that suits it. I was self-assured and flexible, flattering to the ladies and accommodating towards my superiors; and, above all, I knew how to hold my tongue when necessary. That is the main reason why I managed to live safely through all the years after the revolution without the slightest difficulty, although I was always to the fore. The Party used me for various tasks. I took the chair at big meetings, I represented the Control Commission at universities, I agitated in the factories, I scoured the shops, I underlined the slogans, I was prosecutor at trials, note-taker behind the scenes, and swashbuckler in the campaigns (you don't have to be careful with the peasants). I was sent to preside over recalcitrant villages, I edited local newspapers, I harassed students with political examinations, and I delivered public speeches. I was active in all the reforms and in all their phases, in all the antis and in all the anti-antis. I even succeeded in extracting something in my favour out of the anti-antis, and in this way I managed to rise to quite a respectable height in the apparatus.

"What I liked best was to talk at meetings. I spoke well and with enthusiasm, and I was even able to awaken the interest and attention of audiences whose members were suffering from chronic rhetorical indigestion because of the vast number of speeches they had consumed. The masses were stuffed with words like a Strassburg goose is stuffed with grain. I was one of the rare ones who could make them willingly swallow another dose. For my services I was decorated with the Stakhanovite medal as a Hero of Labour. And I did work hard too; just imagine—I used to deliver six speeches between six o'clock in the evening and ten, and I did that every evening for six months on end. My photograph appeared in the newspapers, and I was proud. I was still quite young, remember.

"I don't know whether it was on account of that medal or because of my own inborn prudence, but I managed to slip through the meshwork of all the purges. Somehow I managed never to be a Right-winger, or a Leftist, or a Centrist. I was never dogmatic at the moment of flexibility, never flexible at the moment of dogmatism, never too rigid, never a deviationist. I had mastered the valuable art of giving fire to my speeches without providing substance to burn. They never

succeeded in catching me out with a wrong word, or a word in the wrong place, or a word too many. And my words never had a double meaning, which would have been very dangerous. The fact is they had no meaning at all, whilst remaining strictly within the general line of the Party."

After that harangue, which reminded me strongly of Figaro, Lei burst out laughing.

"But if you were never in trouble, and if you had nothing to fear, why did you leave your country, give up your comfortable position, and abandon your Party? Up to now all the refugees I have spoken to suffered personal injury of one kind or another, either from privation or the terror or both. But things seem to have gone well with you. . . ."

"Which doesn't mean that they would always continue like that. You see, under, say, Hitler or the Mikado, everyone could more or less predict his own future. If you happened to be a Jew or a Chinese under the one or the other, you had had it. If on the other hand you happened to be, in the one case, a big blond Aryan or a proper Samurai, you were quite certain that you would steadily go onward and upward. But under Communism the terror takes no heed of caste. Let's be fair—that's the one sphere in which there is real equality. Even the most orthodox members of the Party can unexpectedly find themselves in the cart one day."

"It strikes me that to stay on top all the time under such circumstances you have to be a kind of superman."

"And your humble servant, although admittedly a Hero of Labour, was not one of those. For one thing, the Communist régime is dull and uninspiring, and it depressed me. My natural gaiety and good spirits were not an advantage to me but a handicap, because Communist leaders regard laughter with suspicion. What I said was always just right and there was nothing to trip me up, but what the devil did I find so amusing? And another thing, it was becoming more and more difficult to distance yourself from a chief who had fallen into disgrace; that is to say, in good time and before it happened. When Kao Kang committed suicide, the hundreds of militants who had been in any way associated with him trembled for their lives, and I was one of them. Happily I was able to show that I had never had anything to do with him except quite officially and under written instructions, and once again I was all right. But month after month I heard of old friends and acquaintances—students, journalists, and members of the Communist Youth like myself—who had not been so fortunate.

"And then the Central Committee decided to send 1,000 of its cadres, including 140 leading men, to the 'educational front in order to consolidate the leading role of the Party there'. Communism is always at war with the internal enemy, even ten years after the seizure of power. This time the phantom enemy was entrenched in the higher-educational system, which, however, the Party itself had organised with particular care earlier on. Those 140 leading Communists who had been told off for the job, now took over the posts of rectors and vice-rectors in ninety-three universities or big schools. Other cadres became chief editors of the university presses, the literary and scientific reviews, and so on, and directors of the political courses. The last-named was the job which fell to me.

"According to a directive of the Council of State, no student may receive his degree until he has first been given his political clearance certificate. The granting of such a certificate is based 'on the everyday words and behaviour of the student in question, particularly during rectification campaigns'. All those students whose words and behaviour are found to be contrary to Communism are sent to Sinkiang. It was now my job to supervise the granting or refusal of such certificates, or, in other words, to decide the future fate of each student who came before me. Now although, as I have told you, I am not over-scrupulous, that job didn't suit me at all. Obviously I couldn't give them all political certificates. If I had attempted to, I should immediately have been suspected of sabotaging the instructions of the Central Committee, and there would have been a place for me on the next tumbrel to Sinkiang. As I have already said, I had a certain genius for passing through the flames without getting singed, but the more and more people who did get burned made it increasingly difficult for me to stay unscorched. To make rousing speeches on the platform, or to write edifying fairy tales in the press—that wasn't so bad; you don't have to see who pays the piper. But to break the lives of young people whom I could see turning pale before me in their anguish—that was a bit much even for a seasoned and hard-boiled egg like myself. If they didn't get their political clearance they were inclined to commit suicide, the poor devils. Two of them did it at the University of Chungshan where I was operating. Whereupon the university doctor was promptly arrested."

"The university doctor? Whatever for?"

"You haven't yet understood that under Communism it's the barometer which causes the weather. Someone always has to be re-

sponsible for everything where the Communist Party is concerned. In any case, those two students committed suicide. Life is beautiful, and so are the girls, and the sky, and the mist over the rivers that babble down from the hills. Yet the poor devils deprived themselves of all these things as though there were nothing else in the world capable of making a man happy but books and degrees. They were thought to have done it to get their own back on us. It was then that I began to toy with the idea that there were other skies, other mists, other rivers and other hills just as beautiful elsewhere in the world—and other girls too. But for the moment I didn't go any further than toying with that idea which had come to me one beautiful summer's evening when I happened to have a little time free to think. . . .”

“And that's what made you decide to leave?”

“Well, not exactly. The purge reached the journalists. Now, as I told you, I had played quite an active role in that particular corporation, and the *Wen Hui Pao*, on which I had worked, was denounced for having used small type to announce a message from Mao, whilst the chief editor of the *Kwangming Jih Pao*, Chu An-peng, was taken to prison for having said that the task of a journalist was primarily to get the news. In consequence it seemed to me that the fire was creeping closer and closer to my own feet. I wasn't directly concerned, mark you, because at the time in question the Party happened to have taken me away from journalism, and given me other work to do; but all the same I was 'corporatively' responsible.

“And since the de-Stalinisation, and Yugoslav revisionism, and, above all, after the Hungarian Revolution, every Communist became suspect. Might he not be leaning secretly towards Tito? Or perhaps even towards Nagy? And then, why did he have any inward thoughts at all? That suggested a soul, and a soul isn't Marxist-Leninist; it isn't something clear and definite; it's something out of range—something in the blank margin.”

“And the Central Committee doesn't like that?”

“No, and quite rightly not. Because it's there, where nothing is down in black and white, that a man's real thoughts take refuge. As a matter of fact, I can admit it now: when Wang Tse got to work on me right in the beginning, he turned me into a uniform molecule exactly the same outside as all the rest, but at the centre of that molecule there was still Lei, and not the Central Committee. That was often the case, and that's why the Central Committee scratched away more and more furiously at the outside in an attempt to discover what was

inside. Once that started no Communist, not even the most prudent, was safe any more."

"It's incredible to me that the head can so mutilate the body that supports and nourishes it and still remain alive."

"Now that's the one thing I really have thought about a great deal. And I think I've got the answer. Under totalitarian régimes there's only one way for the individual to rise, and that is as an agent of the régime itself. A democratic régime allows a man to follow his bent in numerous different spheres—business, professions, and even opposition politics—but under a totalitarian dictatorship, in which everything converges on political power or emanates from it, there is no other way to escape from the condition of a pariah but by becoming an agent of that power. Now the fascination of that one solution is so great that a man is prepared to accept almost any risk in order to grasp it, including even the risk of losing his own life; particularly as the risk to his life is hardly lessened if he remains a pariah, because the despotism does not cut off the heads of its praetorian guard only, but the heads of its ordinary subjects as well—to such an extent, in fact, that there is no longer an alternative between security in effacement and peril in notoriety. Since the lightning is just as likely to strike the hovel as the villa, why not aim for the latter—and the car that goes with it? And that is why, I think, that the more totalitarian a power is, the more people there are anxious to take part in exercising it, and the more able the power is in consequence to cut off their heads when it so feels inclined; or, in other words, to be completely totalitarian.

"But to return to myself: in falling on the heads of my former chiefs and collaborators, the terror closed in on me. In the province of Yunnan, where I had worked, six members of the Party were accused of anti-Party activities. And Li Ch'un-jen, one of the Party members who had worked with me during the universities' purging campaign, was deported for having said: 'The Communist authorities in Lutien exhausted the peasants in building embankments.' Then eight members of the provincial government of the Kwangsi district were removed from office by an order of the Party because 'they had falsely charged the Party with having arrogated the functions of the provincial government'."

"Didn't that measure itself prove how right the punished were?"

"What shall I say to that? You could never tell. You felt as though

you were locked up in an asylum in which all the warders were themselves mad.”

“Is that what made you decide to leave finally?”

“I could say yes, I suppose. But to be quite honest I will tell you just what made me break out of my shell—no easy matter when the shell is as thick as a prison wall. No, it was a quite harmless incident, but because it had a human form it left me no peace. One day I received a letter from a student who had been sent into the countryside to work because he had not been given his political clearance certificate. Here it is.”

Lei went through those laborious contortions I had witnessed so often with refugees when they were fishing some relic out of a remote pocket: a letter, a press-cutting, some reminder of former days, the last words of a mother. Lei, the sceptic, also preserved his piece of yellowing paper. And now he handed it to me. It was a press-cutting reproducing the letter of the student in question:

“Dear Comrade, since I was refused permission to continue my studies I have lived in a state of depression which has robbed me of all appetite. All my life was spent in the town and at a school. I have never had any experience of agriculture, and my physical constitution is not robust enough to stand the hard work involved. I have to work from dawn to sunset, and I find the work so exhausting that my body is one mass of aches and pains. My spine no longer supports me upright when I try to straighten my back. I shudder at the thought that this kind of work may go on all my life. Really, comrade, it makes no sense to force a High-School graduate to cart manure all his life. The mere thought almost drives me to distraction. . . . But the worst thing for me is to suffer the insults and mockery of the young villagers. That is something I can’t stand any longer. Their language is coarse and vulgar and they brawl over the least thing. They know nothing about personal hygiene and in consequence they stink. I am not accustomed to living amongst such people. After all, everyone has his own ideas and his own aspirations. Who doesn’t cherish the idea of bettering himself in his life, seeing that the golden age hasn’t yet dawned? I don’t want to be cooped up in a village all my life. Dear comrade, won’t you help me? I beg of you . . .”

“And what did you do when you received that letter?”

“I handed it to the police.”

"Oh!" I exclaimed in ill-concealed horror; though I reproached myself immediately, because it's so easy for someone who lives in a free world to be censorious about the behaviour of those who live in a police State.

"Of course I did," insisted Lei, "and any Communist would have done the same. Don't forget that wherever we set our foot there were traps. The police could very easily have arranged to have such a letter sent to a comrade precisely in order to see whether he subsequently handed it to the proper quarter or not."

"And what happened then?"

"The letter went through the usual channels in the police administration; but as it happened, just at that time, the Party had decided to launch a little self-criticism in connection with the excesses which had marked the liquidation of the Right-wingers, including the sending of students to work on the land, so that letter was published, together with others of the same sort as part and parcel of the campaign to let loose a new wave of 'rectifications'.³ As for me, I racked my brains to try and remember which of the many students who had passed through my hands it was. And then, quite suddenly, I recalled his face. He was the son of an artisan. And I also remembered that I had quite arbitrarily refused him his certificate because I hadn't made up my quota of refusals for that month."

"What did you say? Your quota! Did they fix a definite number of refusals in advance, then?"

"Yes, of course: the 'ploughings' were planned in advance like everything else. A certain amount of labour power was required in the fields, and it had to be supplied. Mao was determined to make a certain number of examples amongst the students, because the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign had revealed the existence of profound hostility towards the régime among them. He therefore decided that hundreds of thousands of intellectuals must be sent to agricultural work in order to 're-educate' them by physical labour. But to go back to my dilemma: I needed some more to make up the number. I didn't dare plough the sons of Party members; that would have caused trouble, so I chose students without family influence. And this fellow was one."

"Did you get him back from the fields?"

³ In *China Youth* of January 1, 1958, I found a similar letter published from a student named Chia Hung-jui, but I am not sure that he is the student Lei referred to.

"I couldn't do a thing for him. To have done anything would have been to admit that I had been wrong to send him there in the first place, and in those particular circumstances that would have seen me on my way to Sinkiang—and it wouldn't have got him back anyway. You see, if he had been brought back he would have told his friends and comrades what sort of conditions he had been compelled to live under, and that would have caused unnecessary trouble and compromised the smooth working of subsequent transfers. But in consequence of this incident I began to draw practical conclusions from those vague thoughts of mine about the hills, and the rivers and the mists: where? when? how? My reputation was still high, and I still had that medal as a Hero of Labour. My chiefs were therefore less likely to suspect me of any secret desire to escape. So, when I filed an application to be sent with a mission to India, they didn't smell a rat, and my application was granted. But as soon as we got to Calcutta I took French leave—begging your pardon—and fled to Hongkong."

"Wasn't that coming very close to those who were now your deadly enemies?"

"Yes, but none of those other beautiful countries I had dreamt of in my reveries give visas lightly to people with yellow skins. We Chinese are victims of racial discrimination almost everywhere. Hongkong is about the only place where a Chinese without proper papers can lose himself in a mass of people of his own race."

"I see. Now I did warn you that I was going to ask you one or two indiscreet questions, and for one thing I should like to know something about the state of mind of the Communist cadres. I have already had long discussions with a refugee named Ku, a former member of the Chinese Communist Party, who is at present at the Rennie's Hill camp."

"Ku? Oh, I know him. He's an idealist, like a good many of the Old Guard."

"But as a Communist, surely you were too?"

"An idealist? No. The Young Guard is composed of activists who obey orders and do the practical work of the Party. We are told again and again, and in a great variety of ways, that a Communist must be as obedient as a puppet and as insensible as a tool, always ready to serve the Party blindly without allowing any personal considerations whatsoever to interfere. And we were taught to regard idealism as more of a hindrance than a help. But what about Ku?"

"Well, he told me in effect that when the Communists needed to

gain the confidence of the peasants in order to win power in the State, they gave them land and a certain feeling of security. But when, after the seizure of power, it became necessary to get more out of them in order to feed the towns, the Communists took the land away again and plunged them back into insecurity and arbitrariness. Now what I want to ask you is: Didn't you feel that such a programme was, to say the least of it, cynical?"

Lei, the cynic, became thoughtful at that question, and he stared out of the window in the direction of the country from which he had fled, as though he hoped to extract a little indulgence from its age-old passivity for the evil he had done it.

"Conscience is a very confusing thing," he said finally, "and ours was put through the mill to an unimaginable extent. Sometimes a sudden flash of light would penetrate into the depths of conscience at the sight of some old peasant, bent and wrinkled, begging us not to stamp him as a Kulak because he had managed to work his way up to the possession of three pigs after a long life of hard labour, or at the sight of some gentle, white-faced schoolmistress weeping silently because we had confiscated her precious books; and then perhaps we would suddenly suspect that something was wrong. But then our chiefs would come bustling up, and there would be the Party line and the practical work to stifle our scruples and convince us that we were working for 'the Cause'. A nine-tenths conviction only perhaps, but in the depths of our hearts what conviction is more firmly founded than that? And, above all, we were well trained in the essential behaviour of a good Communist: not to ask oneself questions; not to think, for fear of doubting; and to wrap up our conscience in a thick layer of cotton wool. Fundamentally that's the atmosphere which prevails in all despotisms, and in a text from the days of the T'ang Dynasty I found the advice of an old mandarin to his son: 'Never examine too closely the tasks the Emperor gives you.'"

"That was the atmosphere which prevailed, for example, in German society under Hitler," I put in. "They went to great lengths in order to be able to ignore the existence of the concentration camps."

"Exactly," agreed Lei. "But seeing that I did rob that old peasant of his three pigs I must be honest about it. I must therefore confess to you that the job I was doing pleased me more than it troubled me. I remember reading, in the translation of a book by Malraux, a description of the financiers of Shanghai, and I was overcome with envy at the fabulous power they wielded, at the vast fortunes they

manipulated, and at the way they pulled the strings of government. Well, under Mao, I, the son of a humble schoolmaster, exercised fabulous power too. My power was over huts and not palaces, but as against that it was men I was manipulating and not dollars. I didn't have a marquis and a couple of beautiful ladies as my interlocutors as the characters of Malraux did. Incidentally, I had no interlocutors at all—just audiences. But I controlled the platform, and as soon as I went anywhere I knew that the whole population would be assembled before me, dependent on me, and prepared to do what I said. I was possessed by a lust for power and a mania for organisation.”

“In the West too the Communist Parties are distinguished by their outstanding capacity for organisation. And sometimes I ask myself whether the real secret of those zealots who founded great Churches did not lie primarily in their outstanding capacity as organisers.”

“I think that's true, Madame. For example, our first Taoists preached a very metaphysical doctrine, but at the same time they had a talent for organising their followers which was otherwise quite unknown in that period.”

“Lenin rediscovered the philosopher's stone from Lao Tse, the secret of changing a man into a partisan. And Mao has rediscovered it from Lenin.”

“The supposed genius of Mao, which is so puffed up in the West, resides fundamentally in his organisational capacity. That's his whole secret. Mao is completely taken up with the new cult, which the Bolsheviks made into a really new science; organising all sections of the population, all the needs of life, and all the mainsprings of power to the utmost possible extent. The first thing we had to do when we were sent into a new part of the country was to register the whole population, to split it up into groups and to place them under the control of secretaries, to set up printing offices, to recruit helpers and to put up posters. I say that to have grasped the importance of organisation was a new discovery because it is a tremendous power, and an international power at that. Just think, for example, what we managed to do by exploiting our ‘Young Pioneers’ associations and our ‘Progressive Parents Centres’: in China—where from time immemorial children have unquestioningly obeyed their parents, who themselves invariably consulted the spirits of their ancestors—we got parents to the stage of asking the opinion of their children, who, in the meantime, we had indoctrinated to such an extent that their parents knew that the children would report everything they said and did to us.

"I am quite certain that, *mutatis mutandis*, any group of people anywhere in the world, from Chinese coolies to Wall Street financiers, and including French vintners, Bangkok priests, Norwegian fishermen, Japanese geishas, British aristocrats and Hollywood film actors, could all, without exception, and irrespective of their cultural background, their traditions and their social status, be pressed into a uniform mould by the technique of organisation, if it is pushed far enough to penetrate into their minds and hearts, into the well-springs of their will power and their emotions. And Mao is an even better hand at that than Stalin himself."

"Are you saying that he has succeeded in winning men's minds and hearts?"

Lei looked at me a little ironically as though he were measuring the distance which still separated us despite the fact that he had come over to my camp and I had had the chance of studying his.

"No, of course not," he replied. "I never succeeded in getting a counter-revolutionary to confess his crimes, or to thank me for having brought him that far, without reading in his eyes that he loathed me. The man had become an automaton; his mind and his heart had been deadened, not won. But for Mao and his organisation the important thing is not what goes on in a man's mind and heart, but its outward expression. If our victim says yes and writes yes, or says no and writes no when that suits us better, that's all that's necessary—and the system works. After all, when we say that capitalism is 'the exploitation of man by man' we don't mean that the whole person of the worker is exploited, but only his labour power. Similarly, if I say that Communism is *the oppression of the soul by the soul* [I made a quick note of this extraordinary phrase] I do not mean that Communism moulds the depths of the soul, but only its surface, that part of it which expresses itself outwardly. The Political Bureau has no ambition to make the soul of the organised love the soul which organises, but merely to bring it to attach itself to it as a reflection attaches itself to a luminous object. The Political Bureau is the lamp of China, the organisation of the masses is a mirror with a thousand facets, and the six hundred million Chinese are the innumerable reflections of the lamp in the mirror."

"In short, Communism succeeds in notching back the control of its citizens just beyond the lips, but does not succeed in winning their respect."

"Let us go even further, and say it wins only their hatred."

"Do you think it is enough to synchronise the movements of all men's lips in order to dominate their souls? One day surely, as in Hungary, the soul that lives on underneath will break through and blow out that reflection of yours like a candle; and that will be the end of the Political Bureau."

"If anything of that sort ever threatens, the Political Bureau will just call out the tanks and continue in power, just as it did in Hungary. Perhaps I wasn't sufficiently explicit. The truth is that organisation in itself isn't enough; it has to be supported by force. Any complete formula for government must include force: sceptre and sword, Church and sword, Politbureau and sword. Mao hasn't overlooked that. Apart from the Party organisation his chief care has always been for the army. In fact, there are some who say that his chief talent is military and not political. In any case, it is true to say that the Communist rise to power in China was brought about as much by bayonets as by slogans."

"That's what Ku said too. Referring to the 'Long March' he said that the three sacred things which had to be saved at all costs, even that of life itself, were: the army for war, the archives for the police, and money for propaganda. One could therefore say that, in this order, those things were the three pillars of the Communist system in China. But tell me, this orgy of organisation, wasn't that something new for China?"

"Yes and no. Like everything which succeeds in politics, it was old wine in new bottles. The vast proliferation of offices and regulations was nothing new for China, which was always a paradise for that sort of thing; so much so that we were readily able to exploit the traditions of China. But in the old China the administration confined itself to the sphere of public life; it was not interested in the private lives of the citizens. Beyond that each citizen could live his own life according to his own ideas; and if he had no ideas—and ninety per cent. of the population hadn't—then according to established tradition. And in the sphere of public life to which they confined themselves, our imperial administrators were conservative. Now the two new factors which Communism introduced into that ancient framework were to extend the control of the State to include the private life of the citizen, and to employ the administration to create revolutionary institutions. Our present-day Communist bureaucracy is in effect our old mandarin bureaucracy no longer confining itself to public affairs but penetrating

right into the very recesses of Chinese family life, and, instead of conserving, revolutionising."

"But is this new Chinese Communist mandarin bureaucracy at least more efficient than the ancient mandarin bureaucracy of the Chinese emperors?"

"Once again, yes and no. The organising genius of Communism was exclusively directed towards the seizure of power. But once that was achieved and the gain consolidated, that genius turned into excess in a super-activity which was every bit as baneful as the passivity of Lao Tse. Communist organisation has become an end in itself. As our philosopher Mencius says: 'When you eat to live you are well, but when you eat for the sake of eating you are ill.' Our sin was that of organisation; we shall die of organisation as feudalism died of the sword and capitalism of money. Capitalism developed in the hunt to make money, and because it concentrated only on that it is now dying. Communism came to power thanks to the bureaucracy, and now that the bureaucracy has no other idea but to perpetuate and magnify itself and encroach on everything it is stifling the country.

"I will leave you to judge for yourself: in 1956, 230,000 circulars were issued to departments employing 5,000,000 officials on the way in which their instructions should be carried out. In the State industries, thirty-six per cent. of all those employed are non-productive, and only four per cent. are technicians. And in certain mines and transport undertakings the non-productive percentage is as high as sixty.⁴ At the Ministry of Commerce, only fifty per cent. of the documents submitted to the legal department for advice were dealt with within the space of four months. A further twenty-five per cent. were attended to in anything from four to twelve months; and the remaining twenty-five per cent. took between one year and eighteen months before they received attention. The department to which I was appointed in September 1956 lodged a request for permission to install stoves which were already in our possession. That request was returned to us in June 1957 with a request for further information.

"Ku probably told you about the deluge of instructions which descended on the Kolkhozes regulating the slightest thing in connection with rural life. Now if there was ever a branch of human activity which

⁴ The *People's Daily* of Peking wrote on December 7, 1957: "In sixty government departments 325,032 large posters (12.5 per day per department) were affixed from the beginning of the year to the end of November; 34,112 meetings were held in the departments (1.3 per day per department); 855,866 suggestions were considered, and 161,864 of them were adopted."

has always, and everywhere, succeeded in doing without the services of an army of officials it is agriculture. But in present-day China there are more than ten million officials at work in the countryside, most of whom have never even seen a grain of seed sown. Sometimes the mania for administration ties itself up in such fantastic knots that you would think yourself in a lunatic asylum. For example, for the space of a whole year the Ministries of Public Health and Labour were snowed under by over a thousand notes, commentaries, expositions and counter-expositions concerning the interpretation of a previous directive which declared: 'Socialist health expresses itself in the joy of life in labour.' One version argued that this meant that 'Socialism' must help the people to work joyfully, which in its turn meant that loud-speakers must be installed in the factories to broadcast popular 'music while you work'. But another version said, no, the axiom meant that 'Socialism' must make work itself joyful, which meant that the enthusiasm must lie in the effort itself, and therefore loud-speakers were not necessary. In the end the two versions were synthesised by the Party in a salomonic pronouncement: both joy and health could be obtained by a life of socialist labour, though at the same time the loud-speakers were necessary, but in order to broadcast slogans and exhortations. The plethora of controllers and organisers is unimaginable and inexhaustible. I could multiply such examples *ad infinitum*."

Incidentally, Chou En-lai himself confirmed what Lei said, when at the Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in September 1956 he declared: "At the moment the various departments of the Council of State are greatly overstaffed, and the subordinate services are being inundated with official documents, telegrams and circulars. In fact so many directives are being sent out that even the departmental chiefs themselves are not acquainted with them all." On September 28, 1957, the *People's Daily* in Peking calculated that between fifteen and fifty per cent. of the total number of persons employed by the nationalised industries were non-productive, as compared with seven to eight per cent. formerly.

"Perhaps that is the internal contradiction by which Communism will ultimately perish," I said. "The chronic over-bureaucratisation, which is the penalty of the hunt for position and place under Communism, may be the equivalent of the chronic over-production which is the penalty of the hunt for profits under capitalism."

"You may be right. Each of us, in fact, dies only of himself, that

is to say, of his own excesses. But I'm afraid that particular death will be a lingering one."

"Tell me, what sort of a life do the upper layers of the Communist system live amongst themselves? According to their unpaid propagandists in the West the atmosphere in the highest Communist circles is marked by unexampled ardour, dynamism and devotion. What do you think about it?"

"You probably know that one of the essential practices of Bolshevism, as indeed of all other fanatical movements, is to isolate its own apparatus, if possible right down to the base of the pyramid, from the rest of society. A Communist is born, studies, eats, gets married, goes to the cinema, works and dies without ever going outside the Party, at least not in spirit. In such circumstances the term 'devotion' does not mean the same as elsewhere, because 'the Cause' detaches itself from the sphere of ideas and becomes identified with 'the Party'; in consequence 'working for the Cause' becomes purely and simply carrying out the instructions of the Secretariat. Incidentally, it should be noted that even in that narrow form Communist devotion retains a high degree of efficacy, but it no longer manifests itself in the way it did before and during the seizure of power. Afterwards the devotion gradually degenerates into careerism and servility."

"With us in France it is degenerating in that way even before the seizure of power, at least so far as the officials are concerned."

"As for the ardour, it declines even before the devotion. I don't know how our leaders behaved when they were amongst themselves before the seizure of power, but since the seizure of power I can assure you that there is no fraternal contact, never any friendly relaxation, never any spontaneous *élan*, never an intellectual experiment, never any unstrained exchange of views outside the hierarchy and the dogmas. I rose to quite a respectable height in the hierarchy, just below the gods themselves. But even at that height I can assure you that I never decided anything on my own. I always waited for the orders of those above me, who always waited for the orders of those above them; and when I received my orders I carried them out to the letter. I read our newspapers and I quoted from them. You can't imagine anything more dismal than the internal Party meetings."

"How often did they take place?"

"About once a month. We listened to long and wearisome reports, and we indicated our approval by a series of conventional gestures or brief observations, nods of the head, short ejaculations and

applause. The most difficult thing of all was not to doze off. They were, so to speak, clinical examinations at which they made blood-counts, or engine overhauls, at which they wound us up for the coming month until the next inspection. Do you know that when our superiors called us into their offices they very rarely offered us a seat? We stood up, and both of us had only one thought at the back of our minds: the possibility that the room had been wired, or that a police spy was behind the door taking notes. Incidentally, the régime has less and less need for microphones or eavesdroppers because each of us necessarily becomes a spy on the other, so much so that mentally we mutually begged each other to take care lest we had to denounce each other. Do you know that we were forbidden to destroy the slightest piece of scrap paper? It all had to go whole into our waste-paper baskets, and one of the most important tasks of the secret police was to collect and examine it at the end of the day. And do you know that the dossier of each Communist official has at least fifty pages and a hundred headings, and that each of us would sacrifice father and mother to erase this or that insertion registering this or that imprudent remark we happened to have made on this or that occasion? Do you know that each of us has to pass a sort of refresher political examination which is repeated every two years and lasts several days, and that we not only have to answer innumerable questions, most of which are deliberate traps, but also to give a detailed account of our private lives?

"Do you know that the alpha and omega of Communist politics is to learn about any imminent directives an hour or two before anyone else, so that you can take up the proper posture and make it look as though your attitude were spontaneous?"

"Was that one of the five antis, the one referring to the unseasonable exploitation of State secrets?"

"The whole of China nowadays is nothing but a labyrinth of prison doors and walls, and the whole art of survival consists of being able to look through keyholes successfully."

I was once again struck by the Chinese manner of turning the most abstract notions into concrete images. Lei confirmed an idea which has always seemed obvious to me, namely that a dictatorship can never destroy all the civic virtues. His story showed that the public image of the totalitarian leaders as "stern but inspired" was just one more illusion sedulously spread by their apologists. In a brief phrase Lei cut the Communist giants down to size: as scared helots who

peeped anxiously through keyholes in order to discover what their masters were brewing for them.

"What is the social origin of the Communist leaders?"

"The great majority are intellectuals. Since the Chinese State has become Communist, the bureaucrats have confined recruitment to their own caste. A small minority are 'ranker-officers', like Ku and myself, men who belong to no particular class. There is another minority, whose representatives are to be found chiefly in the army and the police, which consists of deserters from the Kuomintang, and even from the feudalist régimes which preceded it. Do you happen to know who our Minister for People's Sport is? A certain Lou Han, who until the war with Japan exercised the noble profession of War Lord in the province of Yunnan. His speciality was to cut his enemies to pieces in public to the accompaniment of soft music. In those days his enemies were sometimes Communists and sometimes merchants whom he had allowed to grow rich in order subsequently to despoil them. In 1950 he turned his army over to Mao in return for a place in the Communist hierarchy."⁵

"Those little leaders who spy out the decisions of the big leaders through the keyholes, are they at least in solidarity with each other? Do they represent that united cohort swinging into action as one, which is the image the apologists of Bolshevism in the West present for our edification?"

"There are many disagreements in the cohort, and a good deal of friction, but the clamp of the dictatorship prevents it from breaking up. You have no idea what sullen rivalries, what festering hates, and what silent jockeyings for position, exist amongst our cadres. The battle for position and power which goes on at all stages of the apparatus is nonetheless bitter for being silent. The representatives of the four great divisions, political, administrative, technical and military, that is the Party Secretary, the State Governor, the Director of Economics and the Army Commander, in any particular territory, usually envy and detest each other heartily."

"But I take it they all belong to the Party?"

"Of course. But as the Party is the only cock on the dunghill, all rivalries, ambitions and jealousies necessarily clash within its ranks, whereas in France there are various political organisations to shelter them. Because they all take place within the Party, the conflicts are

⁵ Lucien Bodard gives the details of this highly interesting affair in his book, *La Chine de la Douceur*.

cloaked by the censorship instead of coming out into the open as they do elsewhere. And they're so much the worse for that. Amongst the 'politicians' the members of the Old Guard and those of the new eye each other up and down like snarling dogs and spitting cats. The *administrative* leaders are usually recruited from among the former illegal groups maintained by the Party in the 'white' areas dominated by the Kuomintang; the *political* leaders, on the other hand, are chiefly recruited from among the cadres Mao had under his control in the 'red' districts, such as Kiangsi and Yenan; called in our interior jargon 'the bases'. I came from neither the one nor the other, so I could afford to grin to myself when they snarled cautiously at each other and extolled the virtues or stressed the dangers respectively represented by working in the 'white' districts, where you had to cope with Chiang Kai-shek's police, or by working in the 'red' districts, where you had to face his armies.

"In Kansu the Secretary of the Party, Chang Chung-liang, found himself burdened with two Vice-Governors, Sun Tien-tsai and Chen Shen-yi, former leaders of 'white' areas, whilst Chang himself had been leader of a 'red base'. I knew Chang personally, and he was a ruthless fellow, I can tell you. Chen Shen-yi was said to be a better type, but an inveterate opportunist. Chen was driven to suicide by learning that Chang had organised a provocation to implicate him in a *complot*, and he preferred not to wait for the outcome of that. By the way, the *political* chief almost always gets the better of such encounters, which are often as savage as they are hypocritical. There are also bitter disputes, more or less behind the scenes, between the 'natives' and the 'immigrants'; that is to say, between those leaders who are appointed to commands in their own districts, and those who are sent in from outside. For example, I laughed to myself on reading a confidential report to the effect that in Yunnan the central authorities had sent an official to a Kolkhoze to let the discontented peasants know that measures were about to be taken to raise their standards of living, whereupon, the very next day, the provincial authorities sent along another man who innocently informed the members of the Kolkhoze in question that his predecessor had come merely in order to calculate the amount of crops which could be requisitioned."

"Another example of the 'scorpions in a bottle'. It is highly interesting to note that the knights of the historical process tend to devour each other when they're on their own."

"They're eaten up with all the common faults of man—envy,

malice and pettiness—and still more by the faults due to the dictatorship itself: the fear of being slandered by others makes them get their slander in first; the abasement of their own human dignity makes them abase the human dignity of others; the cruelty of their masters towards them makes them cruel to their subordinates. The *technicians* regard the *politicians* as useless windbags, the *military* as worthless swashbucklers, and the *administrative* officials as incompetent scribblers of circulars. In return, the *politicians* regard the *technicians* as pretentious jumped-up careerists, the *military* as narrow-minded strategists, and the *administrative* officials as imbeciles bogged down in red tape. The *administrative* officials regard the *politicians* as lunatic botchers, the *technicians* as greedy parvenus, and the *military* as dangerous parasites. All this time the *intellectuals* strut around in this kingdom of the frogs and evolve pedantic theories which arouse the envy and sarcasm of all the others. And behind them all there are the police, listening and taking notes—which makes them feared and detested by everyone. And at the topmost pinnacle perhaps a dozen celestials hold all the strings in their hands, crossing them, ravelling and unravelling them, pulling them at will, sometimes deliberately setting one group against the other in order to extract advantage from the resultant conflict.”

“To listen to that, it sounds rather as though Communism promotes disunity rather than unity.”

“The Party has persecuted and suppressed the old secret societies ruthlessly, but to no purpose. They have grown up again within the Party itself. They have no ideological basis, and they haven’t the slightest desire to change the existing order; they are simply very exclusive associations, and very secret, which exist solely for the purpose of protecting the interests of their members. Their primary task is, as I have already indicated, to discover before anyone else what plans are about to be launched from the Olympian heights—particularly when they have anything to do with ‘self-criticism’.”

“You mean that there are actually ‘plans’ for self-criticism? That’s wonderful! Are not the two notions of ‘self’ and ‘criticism’ incompatible, in China, with those of ‘tele’ and ‘guided’?”

Lei looked at me a trifle doubtfully, as though he wondered whether I was pulling his leg.

“They tell me that you’re by way of being a specialist in things relating to Communism; I hope therefore that you’re not deceived by the ‘self-criticism’ trick. Never, absolutely never, will you see the Party divided into two camps as the result of self-criticism, as you

certainly would if the self-criticism were spontaneous and the disavowals authentic. No! On a certain day, the Party condemns one hundred per cent. what it previously applauded one hundred per cent.—which is all the proof you need to show that the whole thing was arranged in advance from above. And never, absolutely never, is the *present* Party line, or the *present* leadership, disavowed or criticised. The only things ever ‘self’ criticised are *past* policies, and, similarly, the only people ever condemned are the subordinate officials, or leaders who have fallen from grace. It’s always yesterday for the faults condemned by ‘self-criticism’. No, ‘self-criticism’ is always criticism by the present leaders of subordinate leaders in disgrace or of great leaders who have disappeared.”

“Yes, as a matter of fact, I am well aware of all that from the example of Soviet Communism,” I put in, a trifle nettled at the thought that he could think me so ignorant. “But I didn’t know that Chinese Communism copied its Soviet model so closely. Self-criticism is, in short, a sort of laxative administered by the leaders to the Party members in the same way as doses of self-praise, which the members swallow just as obediently.”

“It is true, though, that the farce is usually imposed on real dissatisfaction and discontent, in order to provide a certain harmless vent. If some action or other has failed too obviously, or if some section of the population is particularly resentful, the Central Committee decides to ease the situation a little—if not by abolishing the abuses which led to the trouble, then at least by recognising to some extent that they are abuses.”

“I realise that. These ‘self-criticism’ campaigns open up a mine of information for the historian, whose view is otherwise blocked by the impenetrability of the dictatorship. Suddenly, within the space of a few months perhaps, a whole sheaf of complaints emerges into the light of day, whereas previously they were hidden in the hearts of humble people who dared not complain openly. But of what interest is that to these new ‘secret societies’ you talk about?”

“Because that self-criticism, whilst revealing real defects, also reveals imaginary offenders—the real offender being, of course, the régime itself. But once you’ve revealed a crime you’ve got to have a criminal, and so the second aim of ‘self-criticism’ is to find scapegoats to take the responsibility for the crimes committed by the Party. After that it’s elementary tactics to choose them from amongst those subordinate leaders the real leaders wish to get rid of. . . .”

"In other words, the facts behind the 'self-criticism' are real but the guilt it denounces is fictitious?"

"Exactly! But it is the second part of the proposition which interests the subordinate Party leaders and officials and fills them with misgiving; and their chief preoccupation is therefore to weigh up every inflexion, every silence, and, you might almost say, every comma or full stop in the articles which appear in the *People's Daily*, in order to make a shrewd guess at what's coming. If a man happens to be good at this highly subtle form of exegesis, then he's much sought after; and he is worth his weight in gold for the particular secret society to which he belongs. If he discovers, from some allusion, or some turn of phrase, that, shall we say, a campaign of 'self-criticism' is about to break in connection with the metalling of the roads, then the discussion is immediately broken off, and everyone rushes away—even if it's midnight—to take his own preventive measures: to delete the slightest phrase which might be in opposition to the 'new line'; to cover up the fact that children have been employed on the job; to make sure that there are witnesses prepared to remember, for example, that a check on the quality of the material employed was demanded; to prepare a speech on the role of the road network in the building up of Socialism; and, above all, to start machinations to ensure that the coming lightning strikes some rival group. By the way, this example of the metalling of the roads isn't imaginary, just to make my point. I personally experienced it in the north of Szechwan, and I can assure you that when anything of that sort is about to break, every moment is precious. The particular group to which I belonged escaped from that bout of self-criticism with a whole skin, because it happened to have the district postmaster in its ranks, and he saw to it that we received the *People's Daily* at midday the day after it appeared in Peking, whereas the other offices did not receive it until the following morning."

Whilst listening to this story I had passed from amusement to horror, so to speak from Courteline to Kafka. So, that was "political life" under a Communist régime! And then to think that there are innocent gulls in our democratic societies who naïvely believe that intrigues and careerism are confined to democracies and are unknown in "strict but incorruptible" Communist régimes! It would have done them good to listen to what Lei had to say. Compared with such cloak-and-dagger brawls in the dark alleyways of the dictatorships, the open discussions in a democracy seem positively inspiring.

"But if your political morals have been debased—as always—by the dictatorship, isn't it at least true to say that the leading Communists do possess *some* exceptional capacities?"

For a moment or two Lei was silent; he appeared to be thinking it over; then he went on:

"As I told you, I have never penetrated into the real leading circles of the Party, and I can't therefore give you any first-hand description of the type of men involved. The only thing which does seem to me quite certain where they are concerned is that they have a will of iron; that they are absolutely unscrupulous—and mind you take 'absolutely' in an absolute fashion!—and that they have hearts of stone. They say that Stalin represented the reincarnation of an old Russian historical predecessor, namely, Ivan the Terrible. Our leading Chinese Communists also have their historical forbear, namely, the Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, the tiger on the throne. In the year 250 B.C. he came to the throne by cutting off the heads of hundreds of thousands of his enemies; then he burnt the books, buried scholars alive, built the Great Wall with great armies of slave labour, unified and extended the Empire, often by shifting whole populations—in short he instituted an absolutist terror. In the second half of the twentieth century our Communist leaders in Peking have been able to think of nothing better than to go back to the methods of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti."

"And what about the batch of leaders immediately below them? Tell me their most typical traits as you were able to observe them—at least the most outstanding. And please tell me at once, on the spur of the moment, and without thinking the matter over."

"Arrogance and duplicity."

"Well, at least that was straight from the shoulder! Would you care to develop that theme? I am quite struck to hear you mention the two reproaches Lenin made on his death-bed to those who were no longer under his control: their boastfulness and their lies."

"As far as their arrogance is concerned, I am quite sure that any Chinese would give you the same answer. And I happen to know a model example which will help you to understand what I mean. On one of my missions I met one of the heroes of the 'Long March', who happened to have studied in Germany. One day the two of us were summoned by a very high personage, a government inspector sent to us from Peking. When we arrived in his office I was startled to see that this inspector was none other than my old mentor Wang Tse, the

man who was first responsible for moulding me to serve the apparatus. Of course he recognised me too, but he did not show it with so much as the flicker of an eyelid, and you could not have said that this unexpected meeting with one of his old pupils had awakened the slightest sentiment in him; instead he was cold, trenchant and intimidating, giving us strict instructions for the intensification of the work of our particular branch in a tone which brooked no contradiction or even discussion, and referring to our subordinate officials as 'Yu Min', which is a term of abuse from the days of the feudal administration and signifies something like stupid, coarse, narrow-minded, vulgar herd. We listened in silence and bowed respectfully when it was all over. But as we went out, my companion muttered resentfully 'Junker'. I asked him what it meant and he told me that it was the name given to the narrow-minded, self-satisfied, reactionary caste of Prussian land-owners under the Hohenzollerns."

"Yes, we know the type in Europe; it is often sent to supervise the activities of Soviet missions abroad. It is a new type of despot produced by Communism, arrogant and self-sufficient. After all, it would be rather naïve to imagine that Lenin's two essential aims, first power and then exclusive power, could produce anything else but those new tycoons of power; or that a classless society could emerge from a windowless government. But what about the second major vice you mentioned: duplicity?"

"Well, take my regional chief for the collectivisation campaign. I had just presented him with a report concerning a special mission carried out against three particularly recalcitrant villages. We had been compelled to deport half of the heads of families in the night and take the others to the Centre in lorries, stuff their 'shares' in the co-operative into their pockets, and force them at the point of the revolver to 'elect' the president and the brigadier the Party had appointed for their 'co-operative'. My chief listened to the report, took notes, and expressed his approval of the measures I had taken. In his office at the time was a reporter of the regional organ of the Party, and he turned to him, saying: 'You have just heard how enthusiastically the peasants have responded. And in your report don't forget to mention that they elected the most meritorious amongst them as president, a peasant of category four who had doubled his production and complied with all their requisitions in a most exemplary fashion.' The reporter replied: 'Yes, their enthusiasm was truly remarkable'; and turning to me he said: 'You were there, Comrade; isn't that the thing which

struck you most?' I replied: 'It certainly was, and you can make a big thing out of it in your article.' That was typical of the whole character of our life. Duplicity permeated all our existence to such an extent that it wasn't easy for us to say off-hand which was the truth: whether the peasants had to be forced into the collectives at the point of the revolver, or whether they flocked into them with enthusiasm. Now the Communist bureaucracy moves and has its being in that double world with perfect ease, and the falsehood which is created by the constant lie enters into its blood and affects all its acts both private and public."⁶

"But what about the selfless devotion of the Communist Party officials we hear so much about? How much of that is true?"

"The Communist régime has certainly succeeded in greatly reducing the incidence of peculation in the administration, but that does not mean that the cadres are 'selfless'. The truth is that the severe punishments for defalcation, extortion and so on, intimidate them. On the other hand, in all those spheres in which self-interest is not punished—career, ambition and privileges—they are not so selfless and disinterested, I can assure you. Each strives to climb as high as he can; because the higher you climb the better you can satisfy the lust for power, and the better you can live—in luxury the officials of the old Kuomintang did not even dream of: fine villas, comfortable domesticity, cars, special schools for the children, and so on. 'Self-criticism' has coined a new phrase for that hunt for place and position which has replaced the old hunt for money pure and simple: *yin-hsioung-tchen-i*, or 'ambitionism'. There are, of course, big social differences amongst the Communist bureaucracy; and the lower employees, in education for instance, are very poorly paid. But towards the top of the ladder officials live in veritable luxury."

"That luxury you talk about, does it go, for example, to the heights indicated in capitalist society by the possession of yachts, castles and race-horses?"

⁶ In his speech to the Congress of the Chinese Communist Party on September 16, 1956, Chou En-lai himself confirmed the truth of this picture, saying: "Many leading comrades strut around importantly and are arrogant during their work. . . . The higher bureaucracy develops into the habit of commanding tyrannically at the lowest levels." And in his report to the Congress of the Communist Party in Shanghai, in December 1957, the First Secretary of the Party, K'o Sh'ing Shih, declared that of the two million "suggestions" received during the "Hundred Flowers" campaign, more than fifty per cent. were bitter complaints against the "feudal" style of life adopted by the superior cadres of the Party, and their smug self-sufficiency.

"No, such ostentatious extravagances are impossible in Mao's China."

"At the same time, believe me, it's true to say that the number of people as rich as that in capitalist society is steadily declining, whilst their influence on the economic system as a whole has become infinitesimal. But because they are blatant cases, they attract everyone's attention and it is their ostentation that provokes resentment and revolt. Under capitalism such excessively rich people represent a dramatic embodiment of social injustice; their wealth being, generally speaking, either inherited or amassed by stock-exchange speculation. Under Communism, however, your more moderately rich men owe their well-being to their function in the State."

"And how much progress does that represent if the State is despotic and the function an imposture? Particularly, as I have already pointed out, both heritage and intrigue also play a role in the struggle for the really higher posts in a Communist régime. The son of a member of the Central Committee has a vastly greater chance of obtaining position and power under Communism than, for example, the son of a poor peasant."

"I should like to exploit the mine of information your memories have opened up in another direction, so let us leave the bureaucracy. What are the other sources of strength on which Mao's régime is based?"

Lei looked out at the vast landscape visible through the window and seemed to be searching for his answer.

"Terror and propaganda," he said finally.

"In that case I'd prefer you to talk about the propaganda, because as far as the terror is concerned other refugees have—alas!—given me only too many tragic details. And, in any case, despite, or perhaps because of, its atrocity, it is a relatively simple theme. Besides, I have heard less of the propaganda side."

"The fact is that propaganda, even more than the terror itself, fills every minute of the day and the head of every Chinese all day. You don't talk about your breathing all the time, do you? Nevertheless you can't live a minute of the day without breathing. First of all, there's that instrument of torture: the loud-speaker. The loud-speaker as a channel of propaganda has become so much a part of Chinese life that when I was first in Hongkong I felt that something was missing."

"I had a somewhat similar experience in Barcelona in 1936. Machine-gun fire had been going on ceaselessly for forty-eight hours,

and then, for some reason, it suddenly ceased. It was as though time were standing still."

"In every corner, all over the place, in the entrances to all public buildings, amongst the foliage in the parks and squares, in the universities, in hospital wards, in museums behind the statues, at railway stations, in all the compartments of every train, absolutely everywhere, loud-speakers blare out a constant stream of 'communiqués', speeches, warnings and exhortations. The noise is so monotonous and so boring that the authorities have had to introduce special intervals of dead silence to draw the people's attention when there is to be a particularly important announcement. The noise suddenly stops, everyone looks up, and then the important announcement comes.

"The eyes of the people are no more spared than their ears; they are caught, filled, startled by posters, streamers, placards and inscriptions on the walls, hoardings, the sides of houses, in the shop windows and in all open spaces. I don't think a single vertical, horizontal or acute plane is ever empty. Even the skies are used, thanks to sky writing by aircraft. There's a pointing finger, a rising graph, an upraised arm, the smiling face of Mao or the villainous face of Eisenhower wherever you look. And then, of course, there are the newspapers, as numerous and as all-devouring as locusts; and because there are still many illiterates in China they contain more pictures than text."

"At least that should make them less boring."

"But even more disagreeable. It's easier not to read print than it is not to look at a cartoon. But perhaps the worst of all is the cinema. We make over six hundred films a year in all dialects; and there isn't one that doesn't do its best to break the record of its predecessor for platitudes and conformism. There's not one which isn't full of stereotyped characters to the point of caricature; and all of them present would-be edifying fables to the point of nausea: the socialist hero who chooses education in preference to love, the treacherous bourgeois who poisons the children's sweets, the Bolshevik leader whose noble silhouette is encircled by a gleaming halo to inspire the hero, confound the traitor and encourage the waverer.

"Then, of course, there are all the compulsory political courses. There isn't a Chinese anywhere in China, no matter what his status or how remote his dwelling, who doesn't have to spend several hours a week listening to political preaching. Incidentally, every meeting of

more than three persons, whether it's to distribute food cards or instructions about how to work a new machine, is used for political propaganda—they never forget to say that the food cards, and the new machinery are both a present from Socialism; and they say it at the beginning, they say it again half-way through, and they say it at the end; they say it again and again. In addition to that steady flow of words, words, words, there are the seasonal floods when great propaganda campaigns are launched, and ordinary meetings swell into mass meetings, mass demonstrations and mass processions (all of them obligatory). Incidentally, what little private life is left to the individual can be interrupted at any time by the arrival of activists bursting into the house to mobilise its inhabitants for this, that or the other activity. In all this the press plays a leading role, because it is the press which reveals the sacred Party line to the general public."

"Isn't it revealing of the logocratic character of Communist régimes that the destiny of a whole people should be dominated by that impalpable and verbal force known as 'the Party line'?"

"Yes," agreed Lei, getting me first to explain the meaning of the word "logocratic". "And the newspapers are the essential instruments of Communist logocracy, the great machine in which the will of the Central Committee is transformed into words, millions of words. It is the press which explains, analyses and clothes the Party line in words. The Communist journalist is a priest in charge of a flock which has to listen to his sermons day after day, and week after week. Each word is deliberate. Sometimes my own copy would take a couple of months to make the rounds from me to my chief, to the Control Commission, to the Party and back again to me. The least inflexion adopted by a newspaper must sound exactly the right note. I was once called to the editorial office of the *Hankow Journal* because a report of mine had been passed on to them saying that the down of ducks collected by the peasants of a Kolkhoze in process of formation had not been handed over to the President like the rest. This caused a month-long discussion. Did the by-products of a duck belong to the peasant like its flesh? Or should the down have been handed over to the Kolkhoze as an artisanal product? On the other hand, if the down were an artisanal product, was it not excluded from the normal contributions to an agricultural co-operative? Should it not therefore be sent to an urban co-operative making eiderdowns? Further, if that report were published, might it not encourage a tendency amongst the Kolkhozes to engage in artisanal production themselves? And in particular, and

above all, what had the Party line to say on the point; or, in other words, what was the historical truth of the matter? Inquiries were instituted, with the necessary circumspection, right up to the summit. I say 'with the necessary circumspection', because if it were discovered that the Party line had a ready-made solution for the problem then it would be a most dangerous thing to reveal by indiscreetly questioning the experts that the questioner was, in fact, ignorant of that solution."

"And what was the upshot of that fascinating investigation?"

"I can't say, because before it had come to an end I was sent elsewhere."

"Weren't you sufficiently curious to read the columns of the newspaper subsequently in order to find out?"

"I can see that you don't know the drill. Apart from one or two national newspapers such as the *People's Daily* of Peking, which are the official organs of the system as a whole, Chinese newspapers are not allowed to circulate outside their own specific area."

"And why not?"

"In order that the news of local difficulties, which for technical and other reasons cannot be entirely suppressed locally, such as floods, famine, or too blatant cases of repression, should not become known elsewhere. That was the reason why, once I was in Chungking, I never heard what finally happened with regard to the scare I had given my colleagues in Hankow over the ducks' down."

"And what about the manner of writing in the Chinese press? Has that remained tolerable? At one time journalism in China had the reputation of writing an elegant, if perhaps a trifle too precious, style. What is the style of Communist journalism like?"

"An absence of all style. The essential technique of Chinese Communist journalism is repetition. Even on that point we were given very precise instructions: this simile or that formula had to be repeated at least five hundred times in speeches, articles, pamphlets and so on during a campaign. In consequence, Communist prose is the dullest and most crushing thing in the world. It is never inventive; it never has any individual colour; it never has the slightest humour. The unexpected and the humorous are both banned because the man who indulges in either tends to escape from the clutches of the State into his own private world. As the censorship weighs heavily on each line and each word in each line, and as, of course, the good Communist

journalist censors his brain in advance—the result is inevitably a dull and depressing stodge. The only time the newspapers let themselves go is when they have a chance of insulting and attacking someone. There is absolutely no limit to the praise showered on the leaders of the régime, and expressions such as ‘prince of history’, ‘glorious guide’, ‘sublime leader’, and ‘brilliant star’ to describe them are mere common-places. The exact contrary is true when there are enemies to be insulted; U.S. leaders, for example, even when they are statesmen, are treated to columns of insult and abuse without respect for diplomatic propriety; they are swine, swindlers, vermin, and so on.”

“I know; and when those gentlemen are stung to reply, they do so in carefully modulated academic tones. Of course I admit that they would only degrade themselves by using similarly vulgar abuse, but at least they should understand that a régime which does indulge in it is ill-disposed towards them, and then draw the political consequences. But let that pass.”

“A statement published in the Peking *Kwang Ming Daily* has since become, so to speak, the charter of Chinese Communist journalism. I have repeated it so often myself that I know it by heart: ‘The press is above all an instrument of propaganda under the control of the Party. It is the instigator and the collective co-ordinator which permits the education of the people, and at the same time delivers blows at the enemy. The relationship between the Party and the press is that of leader and led, that of superior and subordinate. The system of Party Censorship Committees embodies an important Leninist principle of organised journalistic work.’ In that extract you have not only the official doctrine establishing the servility of the press, but also an example of its pedantic character. You can imagine that a journalist who has to carry a ball and chain like that around with him is not likely to write with elegance, any more than a ballet dancer is likely to dance beautifully if her ballet mistress is an elephant. And in fact the culmination of everything in the press as in all other branches of propaganda is the *slogan*. The Party offices and the editorial offices of the Communist press are nothing but factories for the churning out of slogans. The slogan is the punctuation of the Communist tongue. They don’t speak or write two phrases without inserting a slogan. One day I was looking through a geography book for intermediate classes, and on every page there were two slogans printed in big letters in the middle of the text, with no relationship to anything around them. Some of those slogans were repeated as many as ten times during the

course of the book. For example: in a simple announcement about the seasons and the harvests, there was the slogan: 'You owe every grain of rice to Socialism!'

Listening to Lei I had the impression that Mao had really created Orwell's world of 1984 down to the letter. Mentally I made a rapid survey of history and, apart from the Soviet Union, there was nowhere I could find anything equivalent, or indeed anything which, in volume and character, attained even the tenth, even perhaps the hundredth part of it.

"Has no one ever tried to estimate the expense involved in that fantastic volume of propaganda?" I asked.

"Yes, ten per cent. of the national revenue, or fifteen per cent. of the State budget."

"How do you arrive at such exact figures on the spur of the moment?"

"Because the calculation has been made and the result is well known in informed Party circles. A third of the budget goes to the army and the police, a third for administration and propaganda, and a third for the economy. And the State budget covers about three-quarters of the national revenue."

As I was obviously nonplussed, Lei added: "Do you know what is involved in a single campaign such as the one which was launched to explain the new marriage law? Four million agitators hard at work for six months, three million books, thirty million posters, two hundred million pamphlets—not counting the daily stream from the press. And, as a matter of fact, that estimate of ten per cent. of the national revenue accounts for only one aspect of the propaganda campaign, because many other undertakings, spectacular constructions, sumptuous international congresses, brilliant receptions for delegations and so on, which normally come under other budget headings, are in reality nothing but propaganda. We were right to agree that Communism is logocracy."⁷

Whilst Lei was numbing me with such vast figures I mentally reviewed similar expenditure in France (apart from that of the Communist Party of course): half the budgets of the other parties perhaps, a few radio broadcasts, a tenth of the newspapers, a thousandth of the books, pamphlets and posters. . . . As though he had guessed my

⁷ The *Liberation* of Shanghai of May 19, 1958, reckoned that in the week from March 26 to March 31 inclusive the leading personnel of a factory had to attend fourteen mass meetings.

thoughts Lei asked: "How much money is spent on propaganda in France?"

"Apart from the French Communist Party, the total spent on propaganda both public and private in a year can't exceed much more than perhaps thirty million dollars all told. The French Communist Party must spend about two millions a year, but, of course, that doesn't burden the finances of the country much because most of it comes from Moscow."

"And perhaps some of it from Peking now. In other words, the workers in Communist countries must sweat not only to pay for the propaganda intended to benumb them, but also for that intended to confuse and mislead their brothers abroad. But how much does thirty million dollars represent considered as a percentage of French national revenues?"

"Less than a thousandth."

"Which means that our Communist régimes spend a hundred times as much on publicising their ideological wares as the bourgeois democracies do on pushing theirs."

"A proof that Communist goods are a hundred times worse."

Lei laughed appreciatively.

"And isn't there something grotesquely incongruous," I added, "about the fact that those Communist régimes—whose triumph is a matter of historic determinism, so we are told—have to toil and moil so arduously to win the adherence of the people to a process which, so the Communists tell us, is inevitable? While you were talking I was asking myself what was the cause of that folly. Men were never so utterly in the grip of a ruling power as they are in Communist countries. That ruling power is in a position to do exactly what it likes with them, and it can rely on their complete obedience to its whims. Why, on top of all that, does it feel so urgently that it needs their approval, particularly as it knows perfectly well that it will never get it? So we have these colossal convulsions of the spoken and the written word, organised without rhyme or reason! Isn't that a colossal absurdity?"

"The reason behind it all is that they know they have to contend with colossal animosity," Lei replied. "By suppressing all outward criticism the Party only intensifies the underground criticism. Behind each mouth which is tightly closed, or opened only in praise, the Party suspects a hostile spirit inwardly cursing it. The deadening censorship and the organised terror which crushes all expression combine to turn

everyone into a hostile enigma. The primary task of propaganda is to overwhelm those myriads of gagged enemies. And the less they say, or can say, the louder propaganda has to shout. Incidentally that propaganda aims less to convince than to benumb; it aims to saturate men's brains by the sheer quantity of its ideological lime. But another aim of this propaganda is to test the loyalty of those who carry it out, as well as that of its victims, by observing their reactions when they make or suffer it. And, finally, that propaganda serves to some extent to dull the vestigial conscience of the Communist rulers themselves. By always insisting that everything is well, they hope to be able to believe it themselves. In short, though Communist propaganda has many aims, the attempt to convince by logic and reason is not one of them. Propaganda is the verbal rite of the Communist cult. Fundamentally it is summed up in the old Chinese proverb: 'He who has little conscience needs many words.' "



The clock in a near-by church struck eight just as this piece of ancient wisdom served to strip a vulgar imposture. The time had come for me to leave. I now felt a certain sympathy for the young man who had at first struck me as cynical, but who had turned out to have hidden depths. Like the insurgents of Budapest, Lei was a living witness to the fact that the supreme ambition of the vast Communist undertaking had been thwarted; it had failed even in his case, that of a man who had been a professional propagandist. Ten years of terror, ten years of stifling bureaucracy, and a vast cloud of slogans, had not succeeded in distorting the hidden wellsprings of the human spirit. Under the hard crust of official logomachy, the longing for liberty and the respect for truth had remained alive. When I thanked him on parting I was deeply moved because his story had restored my confidence in my fellow men.

And when he told me what he was doing in Hongkong I had to smile to myself at the thought that not even Communism had succeeded in disgusting him with the business of organisation: Lei was now the organising secretary of an evening class. . . .

THE WORKMAN TSONG AND THE
TRADE-UNION OFFICIAL LIANG

WHEN I arrived in Hongkong one of my first aims was to speak with an ordinary workman from Communist China; above all because Mao's revolution claims to be of the workers, by the workers, for the workers. For this reason I was particularly anxious to discover whether this class at least was contented with the new régime. In my first few days in Hongkong I met only peasants, intellectuals and merchants. "Why is that?" I asked my interpreter Fung. "Is it really because working-class people are actually beneficiaries of the new régime?"

"Don't forget," he replied, "that ninety-five per cent. of working people in China are peasants, intellectuals, officials and artisans."

That was true, and it is a point which is often overlooked in Europe. I realised that I could not expect to find more than five per cent. of ordinary working men in the refugee camps, precisely because that is their proportion in Chinese society. In fact the exodus represents an authentic cross-section of the Chinese people.

Tsong was an ordinary working man, class-conscious and organised in his trade union—at least he was in those times when his trade union was not a government organisation. Despite my ignorance of Chinese, as I listened to him I could not help feeling that he was expressing himself forcefully and colourfully, and that my interpreter was doing his best to pass on the specific savour to me. The very human reactions of Tsong proved to me once again, as was the case with all the refugees from Hungary and the Soviet Union I had met, that the iron heel of Bolshevism had crushed only the physical human being and not his spirit, and that its sole effect on the latter was to engender a hatred of the dictatorship. Every time I made this discovery anew I was greatly heartened.

"I preferred to risk my life in getting across the frontier rather than stay behind and allow myself to be turned into a mere beast of burden," said Tsong by way of introduction to our conversation.

There was not an ounce of fat on his sinewy body, and, although

his skin looked almost as creased as the washed-out cotton garments he was wearing, the muscles of his arms and shoulders were visible as though he were the statue of an athlete still under its dust-sheet. And above that emaciated but still athletic body there was an ill-shaven chin, irregular teeth, a flat nose, a shock of jet-black hair, and two lively humorous eyes.

I had been told that a former secretary of one of the Communist trade unions had just arrived at the camp, and as the subjects on which I desired to question him were more or less the same as those on which I intended to question Tsong, I thought it would be a good idea to ask Fung to bring them along together. The trade-union official, whom I shall call Liang, was short and slim with the energetic features and the confident voice of a man accustomed to taking the lead amongst his fellows. He categorically refused to tell me his name, his birth-place or the places in which he had worked. And he persisted in his refusal even when I promised him that I would treat any such information as strictly confidential and not for publication.

"You could lose your notes, or they could be stolen," he said. "No, the risk is too great. The whole of my family is still in China, and if ever my identity came to the ears of the Party the result for them would be tragic. It may be that some of them are already suffering because I deserted, but I am doing my best to be forgotten—for their sakes."

"You use the word 'desertion'—were you a soldier then?"

"A soldier of labour. To leave your work in a factory or elsewhere is punished just as severely as to desert from the army during wartime."

"You must forgive me if my next question sounds a little impertinent, but if you knew that there was a risk of reprisals on your family if you did desert—how is it that this did not prevent your flight?"

"If I had not fled I should have been arrested and brought to trial as a 'right-winger'. During the course of the preliminary interrogations I should have been forced to denounce the innocent and to confess to crimes which I had not committed—and that would just as effectively have compromised my family. Believe me, I weighed up all the pros and the cons, both for them and for me, before I made my decision, and I came to the conclusion that flight was the lesser evil. You people who live in free countries have no idea of the situation in our country, and therefore you are not in a position to judge."

It was a deserved rebuke. It certainly is not fair to judge the

subjects of a dictatorship by the moral standards which are valid for the citizens of a free country. Those who are fortunate enough to live in such a country should never forget that the terrorist régime established by the dictatorships dissolves the basis of right conduct, *i.e.* it destroys those elementary guarantees a free man enjoys in a free society. Such guarantees are so normal and matter-of-fact in a democracy that we are inclined to forget that they represent the very foundation on which we can afford to have moral scruples at all. For example, nothing is more absurd or unfair than for a Westerner, who enjoys freedom almost without thinking of it, to turn up his nose in disapproval because a fugitive from a dictatorship has served that dictatorship whilst compelled to live under its rule, a rule which utterly excludes the notion of individual free will. It is something like the prosperous citizen who turns up his nose at the poor man because economic circumstances force him to take his children away from school and put them to work as soon as he lawfully can. Human liberty is that priceless jewel which allows an individual to live according to his conscience. For a brief moment I had forgotten that. I made a point not to forget it in the future.



Neither Tsong nor Liang spoke anything but Chinese, so once again I needed the services of the worthy Fung and his polyglot assistant. As the heat in the camp was almost insufferable, Fung suggested that we should go down to the beach; and this we did, sitting down in the shade of a rock in the hope of a little coolness. Alas! the sweat burst out on my forehead in little pearls. Only the sight of the sea was refreshing as Tsong told us his story.

"I was employed at a metallurgical works at Anshan in Liaoning. On the whole one can say that Communists were never very popular amongst the Chinese workers. Their support came chiefly from the peasants and the intellectuals. As soon as they seized power in any town, they immediately dissolved the old democratic trade unions and introduced completely new ones of their own, and naturally we resented that. However, one fine day they doubled our wages. Doubled—just like that! I had been one of the first to line up with the new Communist union when the old one was suppressed, and I was greatly relieved to see my action apparently justified. "There you are!" I said to my pals, 'it really is a workers' government; you can't deny it.' I started to calculate: at the new rate of pay I should be able to

afford a bicycle in five years, and a new suit—a linen one like well-to-do people wear, not the cotton rubbish I'm wearing now. I should be able to buy the kids real leather shoes; repair the house, which badly needed it; buy a flute for the old man, who loved playing the flute but hadn't been able to for years; and buy my wife a cupboard to set up the ancestral tablets properly. I was always working on my budget, and I used to carry it around in my pocket. In the meantime I was a good militant. . . ."

"Did you join the Communist Party then?"

"No, I mean a trade-union militant. I went to all the meetings and all the demonstrations, and I marched in all the processions. That was exhilarating. We carried big red banners, and there were streamers with golden characters hung across the streets as we marched along singing revolutionary songs. And on the walls there were big pictures of workers, people like us, and it made us proud and flattered our vanity. The platforms at the meetings were covered with scarlet cloth, like the uniforms our generals used to wear in the old days, and speakers delivered speeches in favour of the people. When we applauded them it sounded like rolling thunder. And then all around us were our friends and work-mates. We felt we had all become brothers. There was no longer any difference between those on the platforms and those at the bench. Big posters said: 'He who does not work, neither shall he eat!' And we found that right and proper. The reign of justice had dawned at last. When we all went home afterwards we felt as though we were intoxicated without having drunk anything. We were drunk with emotion. Oh, they were great days."

Tsong held his chin in his hand with his elbow resting on his knee. It was his way of indulging in reverie. His original enthusiasm ran away like milk that had boiled over, and he added sadly: "Those times won't come back again. And even if they did we shouldn't believe it any more. When I think that we lapped it all up then: the posters, the newspapers, the speeches and the songs. And all the time they were just having us on."

I stole a glance at Liang to see how he was taking it. He was outwardly unmoved, and he seemed almost disinterested, as though it were no concern of his. With a stick he was drawing circles in the sand. Tsong certainly had the same ready tongue as our own urban workmen in France, and he went on with his story without requiring any encouragement from me.

"And we had become the owners of the factories, of course. Just

like that. The boss of my factory had cleared out while the going was good. He was somewhere on British territory. They put a manager in his place, a workman like ourselves, and his job was to help in building up Socialism. Of course, he got more out of it than we did, but all the same, he wasn't the boss. They organised workers councils. Not that they had a great deal to say in the matter though; all the orders came from the Communist Party. But they told us that the Communist Party was the party of the working class, so that everything was going as though we were in charge ourselves.

"For about a year everything did go quite well; and we believed we were working for ourselves, in our own factory, with our own machines. At the end of the year the profits were to be shared out between us—the surplus-value the owner had previously pocketed, so the partog said. That's what he insisted on calling it. But whether it was profit or surplus-value, for us it meant cash¹ we could rattle in our pockets. As we were now all working for ourselves you can imagine that each of us got down to it with a will. We didn't waste a minute, we hardly looked up from our work, we hardly stopped to roll ourselves a cigarette. . . . But at the end of the year there was no surplus-value. And yet we had toiled and sweated—and in the meantime the prices had been steadily rising. All we got to encourage us was speeches, but at least there was no shortage of those. A trade-union leader addressed us, and so did a Party secretary, and a special representative from Peking. And they weren't sparing in words; they denounced the speculators, the counter-revolutionaries, and the bosses of the foreign firms in China, who were all, it appeared, still sucking the blood of the Chinese people. And we had to be satisfied with that. The partog explained it all afterwards: 'It can't be helped,' he told us. 'You see, the big fellows don't let us take away their privileges just like that; they kick back and hit below the belt. But the Party and the People's Police are settling accounts with those vampires now. But you workers must step up production in order to prevent the imperialists from taking everything back again from the masses.'

"All right, so we went back to work and slaved even harder. We did unpaid overtime, we worked on Sundays, and each of us was anxious to be a *lao-mou* (shock worker). But prices still went up and

¹ Tsong used the English word "cash"—pieces of copper with a hole in the middle which could be strung on a string and hung round the neck; for a long time they were current legal tender in China.

up, and before long we had all our old difficulties again to make ends meet. Then came the end of the second year, but there was still no sign of any surplus-value. But lots more words instead: the money had to be put to one side to buy new machines. Thanks to these new machines we should be able to double production, and thus the profits for the workers at the end of the year. It was money well invested and in the end it would benefit us all.

"So once again we got down to it. We took part enthusiastically in 'production competitions', joined in the 'movement for the increase of working hours', and in the 'movement for the increase of industrial norms'. Well, when I say 'we', it was chiefly the band of younger men like me who had been carried away by it all; but there were a lot of others who didn't say anything at all. They paid their dues, of course, and they put up their hands to vote—in any case, you had to vote the right way, it was obligatory. And all the time me and my pals kidded ourselves that they respected us because we worked as hard as we could. But you could feel that the rest of them were really taking part in our campaigns unwillingly.

"Then came the end of the third year, but do you think we touched a brass farthing? All we were treated to was the same old story all over again: the money was being spent on new machines and on crushing the counter-revolutionaries. Not only did we not get anything, but they raised our norms, so we had to work even harder to earn the same pay. In addition we were forced to buy State bonds and to contribute to the cost of the Korean war. And on top of all that we had to take part in another 'movement', this time for a reduction in our wages. 'You can't do less than the bourgeois,' they told us. 'Look, they're offering their wealth to the government of the people.' Well, we had broad backs, but we were getting fed up with it."²

Liang still remained outside the discussion, but instead of circles he was now tracing rectangles with his stick. In order to draw him into the conversation I spoke to him directly: "Our friend Tsong here mentioned the workers councils in the factories; can you tell me anything about how they were set up?"

At that he suspended his operations in the sand and answered:

² Speaking at a conference of shock workers on May 5, 1956, Li Hsien-nien declared: "We have not been able to increase wages in accordance with the increase in productivity." Reported in *New-China Agency* on the same date. And the *People's Daily* of Peking declared on June 21, 1956: "In many undertakings production has increased year after year whilst at the same time the average wage has decreased."

"They consisted of the manager or director of the factory, the chairman of the trade union, the secretary of the Party and one or two representatives of the personnel."

"That's true," interjected Tsong, "but the point is that they had no power at all."

It struck me that if anyone proposed workers councils like that in France he would be laughed out of court.

"The man who really decided everything," Tsong went on, "was the factory director. He fixed wage rates, piece rates, and working norms; he engaged workers and he dismissed them, and he took the disciplinary measures. He was in complete charge. And he didn't consult either the workers council or the trade union. And in any case, we had dozens of lectures and speeches to explain to us that this was just how it ought to be. This director was nominated by a big bug at the Ministry for Industry, who was himself nominated by the government, which was nominated by the Party, which represented the working class. That was how workers always ran their factories. And there was no argument about it either, because it was written down in the works of Stalin and it was called 'the unified command'. Stalin, we were told, discovered it after ten years of revolution, during which they experimented with all sorts of other systems. And now he was generous enough to let us have the benefit of his experience in order to save us the trouble of such costly experiments. Well, all I can say is that when I worked in factories before the revolution, the boss and owner had much less power in his own factory than this new chap did in ours."

"Is that true?" I asked Liang.

"As far as the right to order the workmen around is concerned, yes," said Liang, "but not with regard to the taking of basic decisions. As a matter of fact, a factory director hasn't an easy life. Towards friend Tsong here he is certainly the master, but where the Party is concerned he is a servant like everyone else. For the economic policy in the particular branch with which he is concerned, he receives innumerable directives, often contradictory. And in social policy he has to take his orders from the representative of the Party in his factory, who is the man really pulling all the strings. The factory director will always ask his opinion; and, in fact, he dare not do a thing without his approval. The Party representative is the eye of Peking in the factories. There is also another authority, not so obvious though often just as important, and that is the Soviet adviser—he is the eye of Moscow."

"Isn't it true that there has been some talk in the newspapers about the revival of the workers councils recently?" I asked Liang.

"Yes, they were reactivated in the autumn of 1957, at the second session of the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party, whose decision had, incidentally, previously put them into cold storage. The Peking press announced with a great flourish that they had been re-created in five large undertakings in Manchuria; which is as good as saying that they had not previously existed. The Communist Party proposed to use these bodies, whose chairman is always a member of the Party, as a means of exerting pressure on the factory directors. Some of these latter were unable to conceal their disagreement with the new economic methods introduced, particularly since the formation of the People's Communes. Instead of taking the responsibility for liquidating these directors on to its own shoulders, the Party gets the workers councils to do the job for it. That is a classic Communist trick."

Tsong now turned on Liang.

"Here in Hongkong you denounce the Communists, but in China you trade-union leaders were always on their side. What about Article 4, or 9—I can't remember which—of the Trade Union Law? It says that the trade-union leaders have the task of educating the working masses to carry out the policy of the government in order to strengthen the power of the State.³ But as the State and the Party are just right hand and left hand respectively it follows that the trade-union leaders are the servants of the Communist Party."

"It is true," said Liang, "that the law obliges us, as it obliges everyone, to obey the Communist Party, but certain trade-union leaders have constantly tried to circumvent that. Tsong here may not know it, of course, but although we were appointed, I don't deny it, to serve the Party, some of us did our best to serve the workers; and it is precisely because I, for example, went too far in that direction that I am here now. I was one of those who supported what is called in Party jargon the 'economist doctrine', which was nothing more than a tentative attempt to get the trade unions to concentrate on what we regarded as their real task; namely, to defend the interests of the working class. Very well, the Party quickly put a stop to our efforts, and through the medium of our own trade-union organ it declared that

³ Tsong is referring here to the Law on Trade Unions passed on June 20, 1950, which was followed by another law promulgated on November 16 of the same year.

it was scandalous to try to defend the interests of the masses without first considering the interests of the State.⁴ However, that longing for independence did not cease to smoulder under the ruins of our trade-union movement; so much so that during the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign many trade-union leaders were incautious enough to express it in public. And I was one of them."

At this Liang looked up defiantly.

"Of course," he went on, "it wasn't long before the Party came down on us like a ton of bricks. An editorial in the *People's Daily* told the workers bluntly that 'they must not resist the leadership of the Party in trade-union matters, and that the demand of certain backward workers for the independence of the trade-union movement was harmful, since the Communist Party was the only representative of the working class'.⁵ Because they were anxious to establish this independence and make it possible for the trade-union movement to put forward demands on behalf of the workers, many trade-union leaders were dismissed and denigrated; for example, Comrade Chen Yu-wen, the Assistant General Secretary of our trade-union movement. Some of them even disappeared for good into the prisons and concentration camps."

But Tsong was champing at the bit in his anxiety to continue his own story which I had interrupted out of consideration for Liang.

"To get back to my factory," he began again, "the chaps were getting more and more discontented. Then at one meeting a young fellow with guts got up and demanded: 'The factories belong to us, don't they? Or do they? If they do, then we ought to be allowed a say in the distribution of the profits. Of course I'm in favour of buying machines; who isn't? But we ought to be the ones who decide. But no one ever asks us what we think. So how can you say it's the workers who control the place?' And with that he sat down. Encouraged by this example of plain speaking, another chap got up: 'The price of rice is going up every month,' he complained. 'And as for the oil they give us; well, it's all right to grease machinery with, but not for salads. And if anybody's got sugar it isn't us. We haven't seen a single lump of it in our house for a year. There aren't any shoes in the shops, and you can't buy the children clothes. With our wages now you can buy about half

⁴ Cf., for example, the *People's Daily*, Peking, December 18, 1954.

⁵ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1958. Both Tsong and Liang gave me the gist of the citations in question from memory, but I have quoted them literally, as I have done whenever it has proved possible to obtain the original text.

what you could buy before the revolution. Can't we slow down a bit on the industrialisation? Nobody's put a squib under our backsides. But the kids' bellies need something every day.' And he sat down.

"We hadn't heard that sort of talk since before the revolution, and we were so startled that there was dead silence. You could hear the buzzing of the flies—the campaign against the four pests hadn't yet started. But as the skies hadn't fallen in, a third fellow stood up and demanded: 'Why isn't there enough money to buy machines and give us a bit more too? After all, we've worked like mad. In my workshop alone there are ten Stakhanovites, and they've increased their production fourfold. And all the gangs are doing their best to keep up. If you ask me, it isn't because there isn't enough money, but because there are too many bureaucrats. And then there are all those visitors who come here and live for two or three months on our backs. And all those Soviet experts with their servants—they cost us as much as the capitalists ever did——'

"But he didn't manage to finish all he was going to say because the trade-union leader jumped to his feet and shouted: 'Counter-revolutionaries, imperialist agents! I've let you speak so that you could expose yourselves as American spies. You have been paid to say such things. I have the proofs, here in my case. Yes, I've got the proofs all right. The meeting is closed.' The rest of us had listened to what the three said, and we agreed with it; it was what we all thought but hadn't dared say. But now we were horrified to hear the trade-union leader say they were American spies, and we didn't know what to think. He said he had the proofs in his case, and that impressed us. The next day the three chaps who had opened their mouths weren't on the job. As we discovered afterwards, the first two had been sent off to labour camps, and we never saw them again. The third had a few months' brain-washing and then they prepared a public trial for him."

"Were you present at his trial? Can you remember just what happened?"

"I can indeed. It was about six months later that I saw him again—standing on a platform draped with red, together with about a dozen other accused. They all had their hands tied behind their backs and they were surrounded by armed men. It wasn't easy to recognise him though. His face was sunken in and his hair had gone white, and he looked pretty well done for. Unless you've seen it with your own eyes you can have no idea of how much six months in prison can change a man.

"One after the other they stepped forward and with bowed heads they made their self-criticism, confessing dreadful crimes. But it was all as though they were reciting something they had learned by heart. They all admitted that even under the Kuomintang they had been imperialist agents, and they said that during strikes they had denounced the leaders to the Kuomintang authorities, and that they had been paid for this. They also said that the breakdowns which had held us up so often in the factories and meant less wages for us had been due to their sabotage. And what's more they had stolen the spare parts sent to us from the Soviet Union. But we couldn't help remembering that the breakdowns hadn't stopped after those three chaps had been carted off. They went on confessing one thing after the other until you could hardly remember it all. For example, they said they had beaten up a girl typist in order to obtain secrets from her. And then they had sold the plans of our machinery to the Germans. By the way, they were Japanese machines copied from German models—you know the Japanese, they copy everything. So we all wondered why the Germans were prepared to pay so much money for plans of their own machines. And then those chaps who were supposed to be in the pay of America, what had they done with all their money? Because I had known them for years as hard up as the rest of us. Yes, there were a lot of things that sounded very phoney to us in the whole business, but we couldn't make up our minds altogether. The process disgusted us, but at the same time we were troubled by all those villainies they confessed to. So when the judge asked us if we thought the accused deserved the death penalty, we all followed the example of the activists, and shouted: 'Yes, guilty!' After that we all sang the 'International'."

"What happened then?"

"The soldiers herded them all down from the platform, urging them on with shouts and jabbing them in the backs with their rifle butts, and then they were led to the outskirts of the town where a mass grave had been dug. We followed on behind, and when we got there and saw the grave one of my mates whispered to me: 'They must have dug that before the sentence was even passed.' The soldiers made them all kneel down in front of the grave, their hands still tied behind their backs. Then a soldier armed with a revolver placed himself behind each man and put the muzzle against the nape of his neck. In the meantime a line of soldiers was pushing the crowd back, using their rifle butts vigorously. I suddenly felt horribly sick, which was absurd because I had shouted 'guilty!' with the rest. But to see

them all kneeling there about to die, and to think that it was partly my fault; to see my old mate's white head shaking with fright; to see him still alive there in front of his grave. . . . That made my stomach turn over. Then at a signal all the soldiers fired, the bodies slumped down and were pushed into the grave by rifle butts. Someone started up the 'International' again, and I opened my mouth to join in, but I couldn't get a sound out. It was that morning I realised very clearly that strange things were happening with our revolution."

"And then?"

"Three times after that chaps got up at our trade-union meetings and complained about this or that. Those three chaps were also abused as counter-revolutionaries and carted off, and we never saw them again. It seemed that although we were the owners of the factory, the moment we opened our mouths to say a word we were turned into thin air. Have you ever heard such a thing anywhere else? Owners who were executed because they had a word or two to say about how their businesses were being run? At last we realised two things. The first was that if we wanted to keep a whole skin the best thing to do was to pretend to be dumb and say nothing. The only people allowed to criticise were our leaders—I mean to criticise us. The only time we were allowed to open our mouths was when the time came for self-criticism. And the second thing we realised was that those confessions were all boloney."

"How did you come to that conclusion?"

"Well, we weren't really dumb, and we began to find it odd that anyone who said out loud what we all felt, turned out to be an American or a Japanese spy. We're no more stupid than the chaps who sit on their backsides in the offices, even if we do work with our hands."

The metal-worker Tsong had started off by telling me about the thing which had most impressed him under Communism—the terror. He had seen his workmates done to death before his eyes on charges whose veracity he doubted; and he was not likely to forget it for the rest of his life. He said no more now, obviously feeling that he had already told me everything which was likely to interest me. But for me, on the other hand, the interview was just about to begin. He had told me nothing about the terror which I did not know already from the other refugees; what I wanted to know now was something about the conditions under which workers lived in Communist China.

"What was your weekly wage?"

"Well, we hadn't a fixed wage; it varied, because we were on piece-work, and it depended on output."

"Is payment by piece-work general in China?"

At this point Liang put in: "It was, up to the start of the 'great leap forward', but according to what I've read since I've been here, in June 1958 many factories adopted a fixed wage but with no limit to the working day. As the working day had been lengthened to twelve hours, and even more, the government found it advantageous to abolish piece-rates. There is a good deal of dissatisfaction with the change."

"I see," and turning to Tsong again I asked: "What was approximately your weekly wage, on an average?"

"About fifteen yuan⁶ I suppose. But if I happened to be ill or if there were trouble with the castings it would be less, perhaps only ten yuan."

Quick mental calculations showed that on an average Tsong had a purchasing power of rather less than five dollars a week. Incidentally, this figure is confirmed by Mme Lucie Faure who went to China and came back with a report favourable to the régime. She recorded that in a machine-tool works she visited in Chenyang in Manchuria, employing 6,000 workers, wages varied from approximately three to ten dollars a week. As some standard of comparison be it recorded that wages in Hongkong vary between five and eighteen dollars a week! The exclamation mark may serve to express my astonishment that working-class families are expected to live on such miserably low wages. But how many exclamation marks would be necessary to express one's feelings at the thought that in Communist China they are expected to live on half that! Particularly when you bear in mind that Communism in China has slaughtered something like twenty million people allegedly to improve the conditions of the toilers! I turned to Liang:

"The wage Tsong quotes strikes me as unusually low. Can you tell me what it would be on an average for the working class as a whole?"

Liang thought for a moment or two as though seeking to refresh his memory.

"An unskilled worker would earn about two and a half dollars a

⁶ Fifteen yuan would represent rather less than five dollars in purchasing power for such necessities as rice, oil, dried fish, vegetables, sugar, clothing, shoes and so on. Tr.

week, a skilled worker perhaps twice that, and a *lao-mou*, or shock worker, would earn between, say, about ten dollars to rather over twelve dollars a week."

"In other words, there are very great differences in earning power. How do the Communist leaders justify that?"

"They don't feel they have to. The policy of big wage differentials is officially approved. After all, didn't Stalin himself denounce egalitarianism as bourgeois? There is a resolution of our State Council which declares: 'Our wage structure must be revised in order to introduce a marked difference between the wages of skilled and unskilled workers.'"⁷

"And what about the trade unions? Don't they protest against such low wages?"

Liang smiled ironically. He obviously thought that after all I had been told about the situation it was a trifle naïve of me to ask such a question. But I was anxious that no trace of doubt should be left in such an important matter.

"Our trade unions have to toe the Party line very strictly in all matters. For example, when the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Teng, declared: 'We require low wages on principle in order to do away with the difference between the incomes of workers and peasants,'⁸ our trade-union organ—referring to recent wage reductions for apprentices—merely wrote that it provided '*a rational basis for a low-wage system*'.⁹ When the last of the old undertakings in private hands was taken over by the State under the 'joint-management' scheme, the immediate result was to reduce wages to the lower level prevailing in the already State-run industries. In this case trade-union officials received special instructions from the Communist Party as to how they were to explain this reduction of wages to the obviously discontented workers; namely, by telling them that the former capitalist vermin had paid them higher wages in order to corrupt them. The trade-union officials also had to organise 'spontaneous' demonstrations of workers calling on the government to reduce their wages."

Incidentally, these Party instructions were not confined to internal circulars, and the *People's Daily* wrote: "The trade unions must explain to the workers that wages and privileges in private undertakings were too high, and that the capitalists did this deliberately in

⁷ Resolution dated June 6, 1956.

⁸ Cf. *Ta Kung Pao*, October 20, 1957.

⁹ Cf. *Workers' Newspaper*, November 21, 1957.

order to buy the support of their workers; so that it is now absolutely necessary to bring those wage rates down to a reasonable level in the interest of all."¹⁰

Tsong now put in: "In my job there were eight categories of wage-workers, not including those who didn't get any wages at all."

"Do you really mean that some workers didn't get any pay at all?" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes. They were the prisoners sent into the factories to work. And then there were some workers who were paid out only after some time. But as the sums due to them were too high they got only a part."¹¹ That happened to one of my mates who came to us from Mukden. But the engineers got 300 yuan a month."

I made a rapid mental calculation, and discovered that the salaries regarded as so high by Tsong represented about ninety dollars a month in purchasing power.

"What about the factory directors themselves, how much do they earn?"

Neither Tsong nor Liang could tell me anything about that; apparently the earnings of factory directors are a State secret in Communist China.

"They must earn a lot though," said Tsong, "because they're the only ones who can afford to buy linen suits, and silk dresses for their wives. And they have motor-cars with chauffeurs to drive them. They send their children to schools for rich children, and they live in nice parts of the town where the streets are kept clean, and there are fine houses with gardens full of flowers. They and the very high Party officials get a red card which entitles them to three extra catties of rice every month, and extra meat, sugar and oil."

Lucien Bodard reports having seen ginseng, an aphrodisiac, on sale in Peking at 100 yuans an ounce, or over thirty dollars. He also saw diamonds for sale at 9,000 dollars apiece. He quotes other facts which underline the existence of fantastic inequalities: a students' ball held in a bare shed with a cement floor, with no seats, no buffet, with all the dancers in boiler-suits. Tickets had to be bought to secure admission. As against that, a "democratic republican" gala ball, held in a palace,

¹⁰ *People's Daily*, January 17, 1956.

¹¹ For further details concerning this kind of depredation see the *Livre Blanc*, or *White Book*, published by the International Commission on Concentration Camps, and in particular the evidence of R. P. Wattine. Li Fu-ch'un, President of the Planning Commission, admitted that wages due were not always paid out in full; for example, in Mukden from 1952 to 1954.

with panelled walls and painted ceilings, with gilded chairs, a bar, barmen and fifteen musicians in evening dress, the gentlemen in handsome linen suits, their wives in embroidered robes, and the daughters in silks with flowers in their hair and lipstick. In this case there was no charge for admission, but entry was strictly by invitation.¹²

Let me also quote the bitter words of Tai Huang, a reporter of the New-China Press Agency, which were published in the *People's Daily* on August 8, 1957, at the time of the "Hundred Flowers" campaign: "Five per cent. of the population—the leaders of the revolution and of the régime—consumes, with the exception of rice, more than the whole of our peasantry, which represents eighty per cent. of the total population. The great mass of pork and edible oil is consumed by members of the Party. Our peasants live a life of misery and are bitterly disappointed. The old ruling class has been overthrown, but a new one has taken its place. All things considered there is no difference between Taiwan and Peking." Tai Huang was subsequently publicly denigrated and abused, and denounced at a series of meetings on account of his "anti-Party" and "anti-Soviet" views. But one could still read in the *Rural Work Directory* of Kwangtung that "the annual average income of a peasant was equal to the daily average income of an official".

Because such inequalities have grown up in the atmosphere of a dictatorship they inevitably lead to the sort of abuses which were common to feudalism in former times, when nobles made their serfs spend their nights chasing the frogs which croaked in the neighbourhood of their châteaux and disturbed the occupants. The *People's Daily* of August 21, 1956, published a story about the tyranny of a mining director in Fusin which is so fantastic that one might be forgiven for supposing that it belonged to those long-past days. Madame Director occupied an apartment consisting of four large rooms. However, she was not satisfied with this accommodation; she desired a still larger flat, and in a pleasanter residential quarter. She succeeded in finding what she wanted, but (a minor detail) it was already occupied by three other families. She therefore had them summarily evicted. However, "as they were themselves officials, if subordinate ones, it was necessary to find them somewhere else to live", and in consequence other families had to be evicted to make room for them. According to the *People's Daily*: "A large number of families all had to move house on the same day." When one of the housewives thus evicted protested

¹² Lucien Bodard, *La Chine de la Douceur*.

and made difficulties she was told: 'You had better make no trouble, because if Director Tien loses his patience you may find yourself without any place to go to at all.'

But Liang was perturbed above all at the behaviour of those super-privileged, the Soviet experts.

"When the Russians arrived they cleared the shops," he declared. "Leather brief-cases, shoes, handbags, watches, wireless sets, linen, lingerie—you'd think that they'd never seen such things before. But now, the Soviet advisers who swarm in and around our factories and offices are collecting antiques and works of art, including ancient manuscripts—and sending them to Hongkong for safe keeping. They appear in restaurants dressed like bourgeois, and they have their own clubs where they do themselves well, perhaps spending as much on caviar and vodka in one evening as a worker earns in a month. Their Chinese interpreters, dressed in boiler-suits, sit at separate tables in a corner and eat only rice. When the Soviet experts leave the restaurant they walk ahead and their interpreters walk behind them carrying their brief-cases and any other packages. When their Soviet ladies go out shopping they are always accompanied by their Chinese servants to carry their purchases. The Russians feel the same contempt for us as the English did, but they do not trouble to conceal it beneath a mask of formal politeness as the English did."

"That," I said, "is because the English are used to feeling superior by generations of practice, whereas the Russians are, so to speak, nouveaux riches, with all the vulgarity of the parvenu."

"And the brutality of the old Cossack," murmured Liang.

"Whilst we industrial workers," interjected Tsong, "had a rice ration of 450 grams¹³ a day, with 350 for our wives, and from 120 to 300 for each child according to age. But to feed himself properly an active working man needs 600 grams."

"How did you manage to live then?"

"They gave us sweet potatoes to make up. You'll admit that that's no sort of grub for a manual worker. Can you keep a man fit for hard work on potatoes without meat? The authorities issued a decree¹⁴ which said that the proportion of sweet potatoes to the total ration must be fifty per cent. for non-manual workers, forty per cent. for manual workers, and thirty per cent. for government employees. Was that fair? Those office chaps could always find themselves a bit on

¹³ 1 lb is 440 grams. Tr.

¹⁴ This was the decree of the State Council dated October 11, 1957.

the side, whereas we couldn't. And to save rice the same decree ordered bakers to mix fifty per cent. of potato flour in with the rice flour. That made it almost uneatable. You ought to try what it tastes like. And as for the wine; it was bilge."

"Did you own a bicycle, or a wireless, or a camera?"

"What on earth are you thinking of? We hadn't proper coverings or night clothes. We hadn't even proper beds for the children. They slept on the floor in the clothes they wore during the day, just rolled up in some covering or other. If we ever had a little money to spare then it had to be spent on padded clothes for the winter, or on extra rice on the Black Market."

"The housing shortage is bad enough in the West, but it must have been much worse with you. And yet we're told that Mao is a great builder. If he hasn't solved the housing problem, surely he's done something to alleviate it. One can't deny him that can one?"

"Things are worse today than they were before the revolution."

At that bald statement of Tsong's I looked inquiringly at Liang.

"Tsong's right," he confirmed. "Things are worse today than they were before the revolution. There is, of course, a certain amount of building going on, but the forced industrialisation brings in new masses of workers from the rural areas before housing is ready for them."¹⁵

Tsong told me that he paid seven yuan monthly rent for one room without running water, gas or electricity. Six of them lived in it, and quarters were so cramped that his wife had to do the cooking in the street. It would seem that this sort of thing is not confined to Liaoning where he lived, because Deputy Chien Chang-chao declared before the National Assembly: "I have inspected the housing situation in Shantung and I find it very serious. There are families of six and seven persons sleeping in one room, and their cooking has to be done in the street."¹⁶

Tsong also told me that he had to pay ten yuan a month for the

¹⁵ The *People's Daily* of June 26, 1956 writes: "When workers have to sleep in caves, abandoned forts and odd corners, when three generations have to sleep in the same room, when young married couples have nowhere to be alone, surely that represents a real social problem?"

And Lucien Bodard writes: "There are a hundred thousand human beings living in cramped quarters in the floating quarter. It is a hotbed of vice. . . . Things are made worse by the fact that these people have lost their essential occupation—fishing. At nightfall the homeless sleep in the streets." That is the scene along the River of Pearls in Canton under Mao in 1957.

¹⁶ June 20, 1956.

schooling of each child. Liang added that in China education was neither obligatory nor free, but had to be paid for by those who wanted their children to be educated. About 35 cents per month for elementary schooling, about 2.50 dollars for secondary schooling, and about 3.25 dollars a month for higher schooling; books and school meals extra. They are enormous fees for Chinese conditions. Only university education is free, and even then books and meals have to be paid for by the student. Tsong paid fifty yuan a month for food and six yuan for State bonds and other obligatory impositions, and in addition he had to find money for fuel to heat and cook with, and to pay his taxes.

"But it seems to me that the sum total of all that was greater than your wages; how did you manage therefore?"

"My wife had to go out to work too. As she was unskilled, her work brought in only another forty yuan, but without that little extra we could not have got by. Up to the revolution she was able to stay at home and look after the children. But after the revolution our trade-union leader kept on at us at every meeting about the lazy women at home. Those women who didn't take part in production were 'social parasites', he said; and he talked about them as 'kept women', as though they were whores. Well, for a while, most of us were deaf in that ear, because what with the kids, the housework, the cooking and the mending, and standing in queues to get the rations, a housewife had quite enough to do. But then things got worse and worse, prices went up and up, and in order to put enough in the pot for ourselves and our three—that was all we had left then; the others had died—my wife finally went out to work. They deliberately paid us less in order to force our wives to go into the factories. And the kids had to stay on the streets without supervision."

"But when women go out to work don't the factories set up nurseries and kindergartens to look after the children?"

"That's a laugh! There are plenty of nurseries and kindergartens in Communist speeches and statistics, and perhaps there really are some in big towns like Peking and Shanghai, but there weren't any in my town. I've heard they're wonderful—but they're only on view for the tourists. Even then you have to pay for them, and a lot too.¹⁷ Fifteen yuan a month per child. Who on earth could pay that out of

¹⁷ Guillain writes in *Le Monde* that in No. 1. Spinnery in Peking, which is a model factory, there is a good kindergarten and nursery which the authorities are proud of showing to visitors, but they have to be paid for.

what we earn? For us workers the nursery means the oldest girl with the youngest child on her back looking after those in between. I don't know what Communist propagandists tell you people abroad, but I do know what really happened where I lived."

"And what about social security? If you fall ill, or meet with an accident, do they go on paying your wages? And do you get free medical treatment?"

This time Liang got in ahead of Tsong with the answer.

"The social insurance law of February 26, 1951, covers eighty per cent. of the medical costs for workers, and forty per cent. for their families. It also provides for the payment of between fifty and one hundred per cent. of wages during incapacity for a period of three months, according to the length of time the worker in question has been employed. Workers get an old-age pension at sixty, and women at fifty. There is also a maternity grant."

Whilst listening to this, Tsong grew red in the face with suppressed fury, and finally he exclaimed angrily: "But all that's only on paper. How many factories do you know which give their workers things like that? I know some that don't pay anything at all.¹⁸ And at others you don't get anything if the trade-union leader doesn't like the shape of your nose. It's his job to judge how much sick pay you get. If you fall sick, or if you meet with an accident, you have to go to him and ask for your money. You get it or you don't according to whether he likes you or not. And he uses the fact that you're in a jam because of your low wages in order to get still more work out of you, telling you you'll get your money when this or that job is done. It's like the donkey and the carrot. There's no question about it: if the partog doesn't like the look of you, you've had it; because before there's any question of payment out the dossier goes to him; and he approves or disapproves the payment from the 'good-will' angle. If you happen to be a *lao-mou*, or shock worker, then you get more than's due to you. And it's no use your trying to deny it because it's in the law."

Although the unfortunate Liang had suffered the rigours of a system of which he was no more the master than Tsong, he felt himself, as a former trade-union leader, singled out for attack. In order to make some sort of reply, and perhaps in order to show that he knew

¹⁸ The *New-China News Agency* of July 5, 1956, reports that the workers of the Co-operative Spinnery No. 1 at Tientsin "receive no pay when they are away sick or because they have met with an accident, or because, in the case of women, they were confined".

more about it than an uneducated workman, he took refuge in statistics, but in the last resort the figures he quoted only confirmed what Tsong said.

"The law of February 26, 1951, doesn't apply to agricultural workers, to commercial employees, to educational personnel, or to building workers," he said, "though building workers were included on January 2, 1953. And those who work in factories and mines are included only if they are employed in undertakings with more than a hundred workers. That is why the majority of wage workers still do not enjoy social benefits. There are perhaps three and a half million insured workers as against fifteen million uninsured."

"Is it true, as Tsong says, that the major portion of the social insurance benefits go to the Stakhanovites?"

"It is quite true that according to Article 19 of our social legislation the *lao-mou* receive preferential treatment—on condition that their names have been approved by the Party secretary concerned."

"And apart from trade-union leaders and Communists, they are the only ones to benefit from the recreation homes and holiday resorts," Tsong put in triumphantly, obviously delighted that the expert had overlooked a most important point, which he, the simple worker, was able to add. "You're not going to tell me that you did not read that report of Lai Jo-yu, saying that the recreation homes and the works sanatoria are not for the workers but only for Party officials?"

Liang made no attempt to contradict him, and silently went on tracing his designs in the sand.

"And before you've got a right to retire you must have worked for at least twenty-five years, and the last ten with the same undertaking before reaching retirement age.¹⁹ The result is you don't find many workers who have retired. For example, when my grandfather couldn't work any more I had to keep him, though he had worked hard all his life."

"What about when you are seriously ill?" I inquired. "Are your wages paid out during the sickness period?"

"For a worker to be ill in China is a disaster; I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. The doctor comes days after you've sent for him, and the medicine he gives you is no good at all. That's why all the higher officials always buy imported medicines. Workers can't do that.

¹⁹ Cf. *Labour Insurance in New China*, Peking 1953, pp. 13 and 14, and Article 15, paragraphs (a) and (b). Since then the period of uninterrupted employment with one firm prior to reaching retirement age has been reduced to five years.

Just a packet of aspirin imported from abroad costs its weight in gold. Good medicines are only for the privileged." And at that Tsong cast a sidelong glance at Liang. "The best thing for a working man to do under Mao is not to fall sick at all. And as for being paid for time off for sickness—well, you've got to be in a pretty bad way before you get that, I can tell you. The factory doctor decides, and if he granted too much paid sick-leave—supposing there was an epidemic of flu—he'd soon find himself accused of 'sabotaging socialist production'. In any case, all those new doctors they've turned out aren't much good, are they, Liang?"

"It's true that we had to train a lot of new doctors very quickly," admitted Liang, as though he had to excuse himself for the poor quality of the new doctors under Mao, and still identifying himself, though unwillingly, with the new régime. "Some of the new doctors started to practise before they had had more than three years' study. Our national medicaments are still mostly old-wives' specifics dating back to the beginning of the century. I must admit that our government has rather neglected this aspect of the social problem. Incidentally, speaking at the National Assembly, Li Fu-ch'un made no attempt to deny it, and he admitted that there still weren't enough doctors. For example, in a building undertaking in Sian there was only one doctor for 3,000 workers and their families."

"But," I persisted, addressing Tsong, "when you're seriously ill, at least the hospitals are free?"

"Free? Not a hope! Hospital fees are far beyond a worker's pocket."

This time I could really hardly believe my ears.

"You're not telling me that in Communist China poor people have to pay to go into hospital?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, I am telling you just that. And what's more, they've introduced deposits which make it quite impossible. At one time a workman could say to himself: 'Well, if I don't get proper treatment I'll peg out, so I'll go into hospital; and as for paying—we'll see later on.' You can't do that now. You've got to pay a deposit on the hospital costs before they let you in at all."

My inquiries on the point showed that Tsong was telling the truth. Liu Ning-yi admitted to the National Assembly that "the high cost of hospitalisation and the introduction of the deposit system has worsened the conditions of life of working people".²⁰ Whilst Lu Hsiang-hsien

²⁰ Address delivered to the Permanent Committee of the National Assembly on June 22, 1956.

wrote: "The Public Health Department has fixed hospitalisation tariffs too high. The burden placed on working men is too great. Some of them have ruined themselves trying to meet their medical expenses."²¹

At this point Liang intervened: "You shouldn't forget though that working women get two weeks' paid confinement leave."

Tsong admitted this, but he went back to his point: "Take Huan P'ing;²² he was an important official, and he said that the preferential hospital treatment given to officials ought to be abolished. Didn't he? But did they abolish it? No, they didn't and instead they condemned Huang P'ing as a 'right-winger'."

The atmosphere of hostility between the two men did not lessen, and I began to feel sorry that I had invited them together. Once again I had given way to a Western impulse. Not that I had really gone so far as to suppose that a workman and a trade-union official in a Communist country would, *a priori*, feel any sympathy for each other, as would have been the case in a democratic country, because I knew very well that in Communist countries trade unions are merely an appendage of the State. But I had certainly assumed that the tribulations and the disappointments which the two men had suffered would be sufficient to bridge the social gap which separated them under a Communist régime. In Communist countries there is an abyss between ordinary working men and trade-union officials, since the latter are amongst the watchdogs of the State, but I had not reckoned that the Communist State compelled its trade-union officials to bear down so heavily on working men that the hostility it created between them would survive even the emigration and the fraternity of the refugee camp. I had committed the fundamental error against which I had supposed myself immune: to judge a Communist régime by the same criteria as one would normally apply to a democratic one. It is difficult ever to realise fully just how abnormal a Communist régime really is.

"And what about family allowances?" I asked Tsong.

But I first had to explain to him what family allowances were, for he did not even know that such things existed anywhere. When he finally understood he replied: "I'm told that sort of thing exists only in the Soviet Union."

"Then you were told wrong," I was able to inform him. "It exists

²¹ Article in *Current Events*, No. 15, August 10, 1956.

²² Huang P'ing was the Assistant Director of the Department of Public Health in Yunnan. Cf. the *Kunming Daily*, in October 1958.

in all democratic countries—and far more generously. For example, in France a mother with four children receives about 60 dollars a month, compared with about 7 a month in the Soviet Union. A mother with eight children receives over 125 dollars a month compared with just over 7.50 in the Soviet Union.²³ If you translate those allowances into milk then the French mother can buy 5.60 litres a day for each of her children, whereas the Soviet mother can buy only one-tenth of a litre per day for each of hers.”

At that both of my interlocutors stared at me in astonishment. Liang stopped tracing designs in the sand, Tsong was struck dumb, and even Fung looked surprised. It was not that they doubted my word, but what I said took them into a sort of Land of Cockaigne running with milk and honey. I quickly brought them back to the brutal reality of their own over-populated land with my next question:

“And what about unemployment support in Communist China? What’s the system for that?”

Tsong just burst out laughing at the very idea, and that was reply enough, but Liang, still under the influence of his Communist training, replied: “There is no unemployment-relief system in Communist countries because there is no unemployment.”

At that Tsong’s eyes gleamed with malice, and he put in: “If that was really true then it would be all the more reason for having such a system, because then it wouldn’t cost them anything and they could boast about it. As a matter of fact just the opposite is true: there aren’t any arrangements for unemployment pay because there are too many people unemployed in Communist China. You needn’t believe me, Madame: ask the other refugees whether there’s any unemployment in China or not.”

At the first opportunity I followed Tsong’s advice, and I was astonished to learn that in Communist China, where every effort is being made to produce more and more, there were many who had left the country because they had been unable to obtain work. I remembered then that Pierre Fano had stressed “the existence of those millions of unemployed with which Communist China is encumbered”, and that Lucien Bodard had spoken of a man who had looked

²³ I was able to give Tsong such exact figures on the spur of the moment because my friend, the Socialist Darius le Corre, had quite recently made the comparison in *Le Populaire*. He had estimated the purchasing power of the rouble at thirty-five ordinary francs, and that was generous, because according to the calculations of Jules Moch in *U.S.S.R. Les yeux ouverts*, it is only twenty-two ordinary francs for foodstuffs.

for work unsuccessfully for months. And then the explanation readily occurred to me: although skilled workers did not lack employment in Communist China, all those victims of the new régime, the one-time independent artisans, the former tradesmen and merchants, the former fairly prosperous peasants, and all those millions who had previously done small jobs and traditional services, together with the floating mass of peasants flooding into the towns in search of food, made up the permanent mass of unemployed people. They were the Chinese counterpart of those floating masses created in the Soviet Union by the economic earthquakes brought about by Stalin's policies.

Liang, as usual, was in a position to fill in the picture: "There are more than half a million people without jobs in Shanghai. The quays and embankments, once so busy, are now deserted. So many people have been uprooted that all the towns are affected by the scourge of unemployment. The draft Production Programme for January 1956 bears witness to this, and its Article 39 refers bluntly to 'out-of-works'. And then there was an article in the *People's Daily* in November 1957, though I don't remember the exact date, which also let the cat out of the bag by pointing out that if each agricultural co-operative would make a real effort and employ five more persons, then 3,500,000 citizens at present unemployed would be able to find work."

"And what about paid holidays?" I inquired. "How many weeks' paid holiday per year are you entitled to?"

Liang said nothing at all, while Tsong once again had real difficulty in understanding what I was talking about at all. For my part I found it difficult to believe that such a simple notion as holidays with pay should be quite outside Tsong's understanding and experience. In the end I realised that with the exception of one day to celebrate Chinese National Day on October 1, and another on May 1, plus the traditional New Year's Day, Chinese workers have no holidays at all. Even their one free day a week is often "sacrificed" ("willingly" of course) in the cause of increased production. Incidentally this one free day is not like our Sunday as a day of rest. Instead it is, so to speak, a movable feast, which unfortunately often means that married couples do not enjoy their free day together.

"Only the *lao-mous*, Party and trade-union officials have summer holidays," said Tsong. "As an ordinary worker I never had a holiday in my life."

"And what about you?" I asked Liang.

"I had the right to ten days' holiday a year," he said, and added,

looking disapprovingly at Tsong: "But I never took them. I always gave them up in the interests of Socialism."

The poor fellow was defending himself for having been a servant of the Communist régime, though in reality he had been just as much its slave as Tsong. Never in all the ten years that he had had "the right" to his ten days' holiday annually, had he dared to take them. He had "sacrificed" them to Mao. And to use them for what? Building Socialism? Far from it. This extra work was performed to satisfy the vanity of the new Caesars who desired to "cut a dash" in history. And because of that, neither Tsong nor Liang had ever enjoyed the modest pleasure of a few days at the seaside, or in the country, exposing their bodies to the warm rays of the sun, or kicking their naked heels in the cool sea.

"But even so, don't the trade unions do anything at all in the interests of the workers?" I inquired.

"There was a time when trade unions in China did defend the interests of the working man," said Tsong. "But that was under capitalism. Trade unions really were working-class organisations then. They aren't now. For them the workers are always in the wrong and the factory directors always in the right. They never demand higher wages on our behalf—and if we ever do get a bit more they don't fail to let us know it's all through the kindness of Mao. What's the use of trade unions like that? In the old days the unions often organised strikes. But working men aren't allowed to strike under Communism. Anyone who struck today would be denounced and carted off as a counter-revolutionary. You ask Liang if that isn't true, Madame."

"Strikes are forbidden by Article 2 of the Law of November 16, 1950," said Liang in an expressionless voice. "The text says that strikes are forbidden because they could only be against the workers themselves."

"That doesn't seem to me a reason to forbid them so strictly," I said. "If the Chinese people are working for themselves as the Communists say, then obviously they wouldn't want to strike anyway."

"All Communist trade unions care about is sweating and slaving us harder than ever," said Tsong. "It wouldn't be so bad if it were just now and again, but it's all the time, with never a let-up. Did you ever hear of trade unions urging their members to work harder and harder? And that's not all; they poke their noses into our private

affairs too. The only thing they don't bother about is whether we get enough to eat. Lai-jo said that the unions must take part in all the campaigns against the isms: subjectivism, bureaucracy—and a few more I can't remember. Oh, yes—sectarianism. And, of course, help pulverise the right-wingers."

Liang realised that in the eyes of the workman Tsong he stood for the whole Communist bureaucracy, and he therefore felt the need to justify the particular caste to which he belonged, though when it was a question of denouncing the tyranny of the Communist Party he found himself in agreement with Tsong.

"Trade-union leaders have to obey the Party too," he said. "And the Party says that trade unions must educate the masses to labour discipline, and organise socialist competition to ensure the carrying out of the production plans."²⁴

"But it was your trade-union paper which wrote that '*it's no business of the trade unions to protect the interests of working people, because they haven't any special class interests*'."²⁵

Liang merely nodded his head, and Tsong continued to get his complaints off his chest. There were several of them.

"At your meetings we never heard trade-union leaders talking about internationalism, the revolution, the classless society, as we used to at one time."

"Since the revolution has been made, there is nothing surprising about that. It's quite normal. . . ."

"*We* made the revolution, and *they* unmade it. All they talk about is plans and norms. Plans and norms over- and under-fulfilled. Norms—that's their new god. Norms mean more to them than Buddha; more than their ancestors; more even than Karl Marx. In the study groups we had to egg each other on to exceed the norms, to organise socialist competitions between workers, between workshops and between factories. The factory which produced most won the red flag. To get it our factory director once made us work sixteen hours a day for five days on end. And when I think that some blockheads were proud because our factory won the red flag! 'Does it mean any more rice in your bowl?' the others asked. And those blasted norms—they were increasing them all the time. When we said it was impossible to work any harder than we were already working, they got at us with the

²⁴ Trade Union Law of June 29, 1950, Article 9, Section 10.

²⁵ Tsong quoted indirectly from memory, but here as elsewhere I have given the literal text as it appeared in the *Workers' Newspaper* of January 14, 1953.

lao-mous. Of course, we couldn't stand those fellows any more. A good many of the chaps wouldn't even speak to them. And if you reproached them they would plead that they had to feed their children. They weren't altogether happy about it, you could see. There was a turner who lived in the same street as I, and he'd been up pretty well every night because his wife had had a bad confinement and child-bed fever. As a result his production fell, so they put his name up on the board as a bad worker. And there was another fellow, tough and single; he hadn't got a sick wife to keep him awake at night. He was always boasting about over-fulfilling the norms, and one day that made my friend the turner so furious that he picked up a heavy slide-rule and went for that *lao-mou*. . . . You see, we ordinary workers hated these fellows more than we did even the trade-union and Party officials, because, after all, we regarded them as the new bosses in place of the old, and they were only doing their job in exploiting us, but those *lao-mous* were supposed to be our friends—false friends if you like."

"Is it really general to put up notice-boards in the factories denouncing the lazy workers?"

"Big boards decorated with red bunting and flowers. The daily production of each worker in the factory is written up in chalk of various colours, and each week the workers are sorted into different categories. The names of the good workers go on the board of honour, and the names of the bad workers on the board of shame. And the so-called Heroes of Labour, those who exceed the norm by three hundred per cent., have their names on a special board of honour together with their photos."

"Do you mean that there are actually some workers who exceed the norm by as much as all that?"

"Oh yes, and more. There was the famous Yen Ne-yang. He was a turner too. In three days he did a difficult job they had allowed him a month for. He surpassed his norm by one thousand per cent.! After that he was as proud as a peacock. He was photographed; and journalists came to interview him; and an author, like you, wrote a whole book about him. But the result was that he hardly did any more work at all. He drew high wages and we had to sweat to keep him. You ask Liang here whether that isn't true."

I looked at Liang inquiringly, and he declared: "I am opposed to all such excesses. In the last resort they only disorganise production."

"Those *avant-garde* elements, as they call themselves, thought up

another trick to leave the work to us," Tsong went on. "They attended every single meeting that was held. I read in the paper that some factories in Tientsin had twenty-seven meetings a week; that's a meeting every three hours from eight o'clock in the morning to midnight."

"That was excessive too," Liang objected, "and it was condemned, otherwise you wouldn't have read about it in the papers. That sort of thing disorganises production. . . ."

"You see, Madame! He can't see a thing for production. It's always production that gets disorganised. But what about the poor worker? He's more than disorganised; he's broken up, washed out, done for! The worker is always on the go; he has to attend meetings, go to evening classes, stand in queues, do lots of housework because his wife's out working too: light the fire, fetch water and carry wood. And because they've introduced the twelve-hour day there are more and more accidents in the factories.²⁶ And, another thing, because of all this mad rush the pig iron they sent us got worse and worse. It was so bad that in the workshop where they threaded pipe-joints the metal was always flying in the chaps' eyes.

"And in the workshop where the metal was stamped out there were accidents every day, and sometimes fatal ones. By the time I left, the accident rate had doubled by comparison with the previous year. And if anyone got up and complained at a trade-union meeting, they said that to engage in production was like fighting in a war, and in war casualties were inevitable. In any case, they said, most of the accidents were due to carelessness, offences against labour discipline, deviationism, irresponsibility and so on on the part of those who hadn't realised the importance of socialist construction.²⁷

"But instead of replacing the defective machines, introducing safety measures and giving the chaps eye-shields, they just increased what

²⁶ Remember that it was necessary for the Central Committee of the Communist Party to pass a special resolution to ensure that workers got at least five hours' sleep at night.

²⁷ On November 26, 1956, the *New-China Agency* of Shanghai confirmed this high accident rate, and so did Po I Po, the President of the Economic Commission, who declared on June 21, 1956: "During the first five months of this year fatal accidents in the coal-mining industry were fifteen per cent. higher than in the corresponding period of the previous year." And the *Jen Min Chiao Yu* (Vol. I. No. 5.) wrote: "The workers of the Chin Hsin factory have to work twelve hours a day, then attend meetings, and then spend another two hours in cultural activities. This is lowering their productive capacity and unfavourably affecting their health."

they called the ideological work—which kept us up later than ever and meant still more accidents the next day. And the chap who happened to meet with an accident was lucky if they didn't haul him off for a bout of self-criticism to make him admit in the end that the accident was entirely his own fault."

Tsong's last words were so fantastic that I could hardly bring myself to believe them, and I wondered whether his bitterness at all he had been through was making him exaggerate. I looked at Liang again for confirmation, but Liang had nothing to say, and was effacing all the patterns he had made in the sand. It was quite clear that he had no intention of either confirming or denying what Tsong had said. Following up the matter later in order to get at the truth, I found the following statements made by Lai Jo-yu on the subject:

"Working hours have been recklessly extended. Men have sometimes worked for seventy-two hours at a stretch. . . . Factories have required their personnel to work every Sunday for six months on end. This has led to serious over-exertion, a great deal of sickness and many accidents. More than once workers have collapsed from exhaustion, vomiting blood. Some of them have even died. . . . Instead of objectively analysing the causes of these unfortunate accidents in the course of production, the directors of some factories have made the victims responsible for them, declaring the accidents to have been caused by laziness and carelessness. . . . Some factories have even organised meetings at which working men injured in the course of their public duty have been called upon to explain how it came about that they were injured, refusing to allow them to explain the accident by objective causes, and forcing them to find subjective reasons."²⁸

"Apart from those notice-boards of honour and shame you mention, were any other disciplinary measures taken against workmen regarded as unsatisfactory?"

"Well, you could get bad marks, which were entered into your labour-book. And then, of course, you could get the sack, and that was noted in your labour-book too. That was terrible, because it followed you all your life, and made it difficult to get another job. And then they issued National Labour Regulations with fourteen

²⁸ *The Workers' Newspaper*, February 20, 1955. In view of these remarks by the President of the Chinese Communist Trade Unions it is no longer possible to doubt the truth of what the simple workman Tsong told me.

articles.²⁹ The third article said: 'The workman must promptly perform the full task set to him whilst maintaining a high standard of quality, and without waste.' I can't remember the other articles, but I can remember the final bit which said: 'Any violation of any one of these articles shall be punished as follows according to seriousness: a warning, ordinary demerit marks, grave demerit marks, deduction from wages, demotion together with a reduction in wages, dismissal, public conviction of faults together with an obligation of self-criticism, trial before the Factory Court, trial before the ordinary courts.'"

Once again I found the confirmation of what Tsong said in the mouth of the highest trade-union authority. During the campaign of self-criticism which accompanied the purge of the trade unions in 1955-6, Lai Jo-yu denounced "officials who used coercion, false accusations and even imprisonment to increase production". And on another occasion he declared: "Workers are often intimidated by the threat of dismissal. Sometimes workers accused of having violated labour discipline have been detained in the personnel bureau and compelled to confess."³⁰ This latter admission also confirms the story told to me by the bank clerk Chang according to which he had been locked up in the strong-room of his bank in order to make him confess his alleged offences. Further, the official central organ of the Chinese Communist Party, the *People's Daily*, frankly admitted, "trade-union officials often bully workers by threatening to class them amongst those who encourage breaches of labour discipline".³¹

Turning to Liang now, with the intention of consoling him a little, I said: "It is quite clear that you had a thankless task, but I am sure that as far as you could you did your best to make things easier for the workers."

"I expect that's true," put in Tsong, who seemed to have been affected by my charitable attitude, and apparently now wished to placate Liang a little to make up for the various barbed comments he had made. "There were some decent chaps even amongst the bureaucrats, but they didn't last long. As soon as the partog noticed that they were feeling sorry for the workers he'd get rid of them quick. That's obviously just what happened to Liang here. That's why he's now a

²⁹ The Law of May 6, 1954, regulating labour practice in the factories was revised on July 14, 1954, and published by the Chinese Administrative Council in a *Summary of Labour Regulations for State-run Factories*.

³⁰ The first observation was made in October 1956 and the second was quoted on August 30, 1955, in the *New-China News Agency*.

³¹ *People's Daily*, Peking, October 22, 1954.

refugee like the rest of us. You can be quite sure if he was brutal to the workers he wouldn't be here now, but in high position there."

"You mentioned Factory Courts just now," I said to Tsong, feeling happy that I had succeeded in reducing the tension between the two of them. "Is there then some special jurisdiction for working men? Have those courts anything to do with the Committees of Public Safety?"

But it was Liang, feeling to some extent rehabilitated, who answered me with all the assurance of a practised lecturer: "The *Committees of Public Safety* are police bodies instituted in the factories by the Secret Police in August 1952 'to detect subversive elements and ensure the carrying out of all governmental directives', whereas the *Factory Courts* were courts of justice instituted on September 15, 1953, 'to eliminate by auto-correction the vestiges of vicious habits calculated to undermine labour discipline, to increase production and to wake up the workers'."

It struck me as decidedly odd that this proletariat, which had allegedly become the ruling class, caused its police to populate its factories with spies to harass and persecute itself—the boss!

"As though the workers needed to be woken up!" Tsong exclaimed. "What they needed with all those extra hours' work was to be allowed to sleep. Even the trade-union leaders were in agreement with us there, because they had to do all those supplementary hours too. Isn't that true, Liang?"

Liang accepted this conciliatory gesture on the part of the lower orders with the air of a senator who happens to have said something popular but is at the same time anxious not to compromise himself publicly.

"If a workman turns out a bad piece of work, comes late, or is heard complaining about things," Tsong continued, "he is brought before the Factory Court. That simplifies matters, because everyone in the factory has to attend the trial. The trial takes place out of working hours though, because if it didn't we'd be able to have a rest."

The *People's Daily* publishes a description of one of these trials which took place at a mine in Kailan in Hopei: "The judiciary officials submit the indictment and their proposals for punishment to the Party leader and to the Factory Director for approval. This assists the Comrade Judges to draft the sentence and to make the other preparations for the trial."³² The Minister for Justice, Shih Liang, broadcasting from Peking, declared that "thanks to the punishments imposed by the

³² *People's Daily*, Peking, April 19, 1954.

Factory Courts on workers in industry, in the mines and in transport who tried to provoke strikes or to diminish enthusiasm for production, labour discipline has been improved".³³

Turning to Liang I observed: "I have read in the *Workers' Newspaper*³⁴ that, in 1951, 8,636 transport workers were arrested, of whom 297 were executed as 'counter-revolutionaries', and 406 as 'feudal gangsters'. And the President of the Supreme Court, Tung Pi-wu, announced that, from July 1954 to March 1955, 255,000 offences against the building up of Socialism had been tried before the People's Courts.³⁵ Is he referring to these Factory Courts?"

"No. The People's Courts sit outside the factories. According to what was said in leading circles in the trade unions the Factory Courts tried and punished over a hundred thousand cases of 'sabotage'."

"Did either of you know personally any of the workers who were brought before these Factory Courts?" I inquired.

Liang had personally known about a score, and Tsong had known three or four. It appeared, for example, that at the mines in Tangshan a certain Chung Yin had been tried on a charge of having damaged two Soviet machines by wrongly assembling them. Found guilty, he had been executed.

"If a workman no longer liked his job in a particular factory, could he leave it of his own accord and look for a job elsewhere?"

Tsong jabbed his elbow into Liang's ribs, causing him to spoil the pattern he was again drawing in the sand.

"Hear that, Comrade Liang?" And turning to me he exclaimed: "What a hope, Madame! Do you really think a worker could change his job just like that in a Communist country? The Communist factory is like a military barracks. To leave a job without the permission of the factory director would be a very serious offence punishable before the courts.³⁶ Did you ever hear of a soldier changing his barracks because he didn't like it? At the same time, a worker has no right to refuse to be sent to the other end of the earth if his superiors want to send him there. They call that 'the uniform mobility of labour'. Each worker has a labour-book which is endorsed with all the times he came late, or was absent without approved reason, all violations of

³³ October 5, 1954.

³⁴ June 26, 1951.

³⁵ Speech delivered to the National Assembly on June 22, 1955.

³⁶ The Law of May 6, 1954 says: "Any termination of employment must be approved by the Factory Director. Any such action taken without his approval is a breach of labour discipline."

labour discipline, all wastage of material he caused, any convictions, his social antecedents, and a 'character' from each of his employers.³⁷ All those endorsements follow you round like your shadow. A selection committee made up of Party members decides on all questions of employment in each factory. Perhaps it may shock you," Tsong said turning to Liang, whom he seemed anxious to placate after digging him in the ribs, "but personally I'd far sooner work for the old capitalists. At least you could say what you thought without much fear. I can remember once telling a foreman to take a running jump at himself. And then telling him he could pass it on to the boss. After that I took my cap and went off and got myself another job. But you tell a Party official to take a running jump at himself, and see where it'll get you. In the dock as an imperialist spy and an enemy of the people!"

★

"What made you decide to escape to Hongkong?" I asked Tsong. "And how did you manage to get here?"

"My wife died in child-birth, and the child was still-born. It wasn't surprising with the over-exertion in the factory and then the household on top of that. But after that I no longer had anything to hope for either at home or from the revolution. The idea of leaving the country came to me when looking at a postcard a relative of mine had sent me from Hongkong. I had kept it because it was a beautiful picture. It showed a street in Hongkong with the shops full of foodstuffs; fruit, vegetables and fish piled up half-way over the pavement outside the shops. There were mounds of rice, piles of cakes, pagodas of sugar—it was like fairyland in the children's picture-books. My mouth watered just looking at that picture, and I decided I'd like to see it all with my own eyes again.

"But, as you probably know, it isn't easy to get out of Mao's company. The frontiers are guarded like the walls of a fortress. You call it the bamboo curtain, don't you? Believe me, that bamboo is steel and there are guns around too. In addition, they had dished us all out with passports to use even inside the country, and you had to have a special visa if you wanted to go from one province to another. Even if you wanted to sleep a night away from your own

³⁷ The labour-book of the Chinese workman is an exact replica of that carried by his equivalent in the Soviet Union. Its introduction caused Victor Serge to exclaim: "Registered cattle, that's what they've made of the Russian people!" It was an adaptation of the famous expression used formerly to describe the serfs in Tsarist Russia, "baptised cattle".

home for some reason or other you had to get police permission. After the death of my wife I told the police that I had to take my children to their grandparents', and they gave me a precious visa. For me it was worth more than rubies, because by the time I got with the children to their grandparents' I was three-quarters of the way here, though it was still a long way, because China's a big country. Then I asked permission to go to work in Fukien, which borders on Hongkong territory. But without asking my opinion the authorities decided to send me to one of the far-distant places which Mao is colonising with people from the coastal districts. That looked like the end of my plans.

"But I was determined not to spend the rest of my life in the prison which had killed my wife. I wanted to get away, to start a new life somewhere else. After all, I wasn't old yet; I was only forty, and I was terribly unhappy where I was. The day before the convoy was to leave for the north I deliberately flung myself down some stairs and broke my leg. The authorities suspected nothing, and believed that it was an accident. I was still strong and my constitution hadn't been undermined so I soon got better. While I was immobilised I changed the name on my trade-union card, and I spent nights practising using it and forgetting the old one. When my leg had mended sufficiently I set off, empty-handed, to Fukien.

"On the way I had to look for work of some sort, because I had nothing to live on. That wasn't easy, and there were lots of questions to answer. Where did I come from? Why had I left my last employment? And what about my trade-union card? Not too bad, but all the same they sent for my dossier from the old place. Fortunately the factory I had applied to for work was behind with its plan and so they took me on temporarily while waiting for the result of their inquiries. I worked like a slave, and went in for a bit of Stakhanovism on my own account for a change, and it was my turn to get black looks from the other chaps. And I ate very frugally, drank nothing but water, and slept in a communal dormitory. As soon as I had got a little money together I cleared off again. I won't tell you all my ups and downs, how I was soon hard up again, how I had to steal food, how I worked for a while as a docker, how my heart beat when an agent asked me for my papers or pronounced my new name.

"Anyway, one night I managed to get over the frontier. The biggest danger came from those revolving searchlights they've got everywhere. Every few minutes I had to go to ground like a rabbit to avoid the light. There were soldiers guarding the frontier, of course,

but they weren't particularly keen, and they didn't go out of their way to be zealous. Of course, if you showed yourself they'd fire, but they didn't bother much about rustlings in the dark, or vague shadows. But it was different with the machine-gun posts on the raised observation towers; they were all Communists, and dead keen: the more refugees they shot the better they were pleased. Perhaps they were paid piece-rates, like everyone else in China. But the worst of all were the police dogs. They had no more heart or soul or conscience than the Communists. If they heard a rustling or picked up a scent they'd dash after it immediately, making the night hideous with their baying. You couldn't throw stones at them in the night because you couldn't see them. They couldn't see you either, but they could scent you, and they'd come straight at you as though it were broad daylight. And they knew the ground too. They took short cuts and jumped over obstacles. It was because of those savage dogs that many fugitives preferred to try their luck by sea.

"However, I had been told the technique; you went along by the water—the sea, a river or a canal—and the moment you heard the baying of the dogs you threw yourself into the water. On one occasion I had to stay in the water all day, and I couldn't go on again until the following night. But I managed it, and as soon as I found the first signs in Chinese and some other language I couldn't read, found a piece of newspaper printed on fine white paper like silk, saw people walking around, not in blue boiler-suits but in fine clothes as though they were on holiday, and saw shops full of foodstuffs like the picture on my postcard, I knew I wasn't in Communist territory any more. I was in Hongkong territory and safe. When I first realised it, I went off into fits of laughter and people thought I'd gone mad. Since I've been here I've heard that my eldest son has joined the resistance and is fighting to free his country of the Communist bloodsuckers, the kanpous and the Cossacks. When the whole country rises we'll all go back to take part in the fighting. Won't we, Liang?"

A GROUP OF FISHERMEN

FUNG took me this time to see, not one refugee, but a whole group, whose spectacular arrival had created a sensation, and whose story was deeply moving. They were fishermen from Kwangtung. On our way we occupied our time as usual in an effort to make up ground and deal with the many political questions in which I was interested. This time I asked him about Communist activity in Hongkong, apart, for example, from the gangsterism which went on in connection with the opium traffic organised from Peking in order to subsidise the Communist Parties of Asia, which we had already discussed.

It appeared that political parties were not recognised by the Hongkong authorities. Any Chinese caught engaging in political activity on behalf of the Kuomintang was immediately deported to Formosa. Any Chinese caught similarly engaged on behalf of the Communist Party was sent off to Communist China. When Fung told me this it struck me that it might be a good idea for France—and perhaps other countries too—if we sent Thorez, Duclos and their friends off to Moscow to build up Socialism there (where it is certainly most needed); we'd be able to breathe more freely in Paris.

Unfortunately, it would seem, this process does not always go smoothly. Peking often doesn't want its agents back, for the simple reason that it has sent them to Hongkong to cause trouble, and it wants them to go on doing so. The Hongkong authorities, on the other hand, are very anxious to get rid of them. When Peking refuses to accept them, these Communist agents are left high and dry, like Tolstoy's heroes, between heaven and earth, a position entirely satisfactory to no one concerned. Then the Hongkong authorities had an idea; they deported the Communist agents to a desert island beyond the territorial limits and informed their powerful neighbour of what they had done: "There they are; they're yours; go and fetch them. If you don't they'll die." But the reply from Peking was disconcerting: "Why should we worry? There are plenty where they came from: we'll

send you some more." "But surely," objected Hongkong, "you're not going to let your own comrades die of hunger on a desert island when you could easily take them off?" "If that bothers you," replied Peking, "go and fetch them back; you put them there in the first place."

Neither side would give way. Days passed, and public opinion began to make itself heard—in Hongkong, of course; there's no such thing in Mao's China. The behaviour of the Hongkong authorities was a violation of the Rights of Man. It was barbarism unworthy of civilised people. It was deliberate mass murder. It was . . . Of course, all these indignant protests which came from all sides were addressed solely to the British. The fact that these undesirables had come from Mao's China, that they had illegally entered Hongkong territory with the deliberate intention of subversion, that they were agents of Mao, and that there was a million times more room for them in China than in Hongkong—all these things were ignored. *A priori*, for the protesters, barbarism was a matter of British imperialism; that had to be so by definition. Mao was not concerned with the Rights of Man; those heady and sentimental principles are intended solely to hamper the "decadent" bourgeoisie. The chorus of disapproval increased to a rumble, the morally indignant Communists had a field-day. And in the end—as might have been expected—it was British imperialism which gave way: the undesirables were taken off their desert island, and as they couldn't be detained for the rest of their lives—again those Rights of Man!—the hard-pressed colony had, willy-nilly, to assimilate them.



"Our new War Lords" was how the Chinese fishermen referred to their new Communist bosses. Since they first began to arrive in Hongkong a few years ago, many of them have dispersed, but there is still a hard core living in the floating village of Aberdeen. It was there we went to meet the new arrivals, making our way through one of the most extraordinary and swarming masses of human beings to be found anywhere in the world.

Being unable to find any habitable space free on land these Chinese have made themselves a lodging on the water, and it is estimated that about 150,000 of them are now swarming in these lacustrine human-termite conglomerations, living on junks whose tattered and drooping sails are reminiscent of field scarecrows, or on flat sampans with a

barrel-shaped structure at one end under which the whole family crowds together for the night. After dark the crazy little vessels are moored so close to each other that the water in which they float can no longer be seen. And during the day they glide out noiselessly and fearlessly between the steamers and the warships, making their way out to deeper water to fish and earn themselves the slender subsistence on which the lives of their occupants depend. But from July to October they have to stay put, because that is the typhoon season, and then not one of those cockleshells would stay afloat for more than a minute.

This strange population of human water-rats is fed by two streams: the "river sedentaries", chiefly Cantonese, and "the nomads of the sea", chiefly from the province of Fukien. Generation after generation of Chinese families is born, lives, works, procreates and dies on these flimsy boats. Aberdeen is one of those floating fishing villages. It is also a tourist centre, for, unfortunately, the picturesque is so often an accompaniment to the indigence of man and the cruelty of nature. It is there that one can find the famous floating restaurants, where the guest can, if he wishes, first catch the fish he will eat. As soon as a tourist appears on the quayside he is surrounded by a swarm of pretty Chinese girls, who take his arm, and assure him in pidgin English that the particular restaurant for which they are working is quite the best from every point of view, that he can be taken there safe and sound in this or that boat for a few pennies, and afterwards, should he feel so inclined, spend the rest of the night in their experienced arms for just a trifle more.

We took one of those antediluvian vessels with a dilapidated baldachin at one end. The father steered the boat; the mother was doing her cooking; a big girl looked at us shyly, chewing the end of her pigtail; the eldest son was busy with a dirty net—with his eyes on my feet the whole time. Then there was the bare bottom of another but smaller son in the air, and beyond that another one, and only the gloom under the shelter prevented me from counting the rest of the family.



On the way Fung told me the moving story of the arrival of the group of fishermen we were going to meet. One morning, in September 1955, no less than 120 fishing boats, swarming with people, appeared in the Hongkong roads. The bigger vessels were flying the flag of Free China, made up of various odds and ends on the way. By the time they put in to the quayside it was full of interested onlookers.

The leaders of the expedition landed whilst the mass of the refugees remained on board, waiting silently, and devouring the scene with their eyes. Leaving behind a great silence, the leaders of these men and women went to the representative of the British authorities who was on the embankment and they addressed him courteously with a ceremonial worthy of the ancient days of Chinese *pourparlers*. They told him they were refugees from Communist China—450 of them, all fishermen with their families—and they asked for asylum.

Their spokesman, obviously the brains of the expedition, explained that they were well aware that Hongkong was the territory of Her Gracious Majesty the Queen of London, whom they had no wish to embarrass. They asked for no charity, and they could earn their living by fishing. They promised that they would cause no trouble to anyone, and that they would scrupulously obey the laws of the Queen, which, as they knew, they said, were fair, and allowed a man to live and work in freedom. If their request could not be granted, they would put out to sea again and search for some other asylum. In the cockleshells that had made the crossing, all the fugitives had dressed themselves as well as they were able, washed themselves and combed their hair, and quite generally done their best to make themselves worthy if uninvited guests of the Queen.

When the deputation returned to the boats to tell the great news that their request for asylum had been granted, there were shouts of relieved joy, and the fugitives danced with delight and embraced each other. In a very short time everybody was on shore, the old women weeping with joy. The representatives of the refugee organisations hurried to help, journalists crowded round to hear the story, press photographers took pictures which subsequently went round all the countries of Asia.

And the same thing happened when I went on board the "flagship" of this expedition that had carried them all out of bondage in the new Egypt. Seeing that I had a camera the children crowded round me, and they, and even their more timid mothers, offered themselves eagerly or shyly for my objective. This particular boat was quite a cut above the others which covered the bay all around, and it kept itself a little apart from the immense amphibian octopus formed by the remainder. It was a sort of "club" where the general staff of the fugitive fishermen gathered. And then the leader of the historic maritime expedition—their Moses, so to speak—came forward to meet me, accompanied by his adjutants. The mob parted respectfully to make way for him.

They were all bronzed and yellow like pressed-out lemons; thin and sinewy, but lively and vigorous, and solid on their feet. And their leader sported something very rare in modern China, a goatee—almost as though that attribute were inseparable from the character of a Moses, wherever he might be found. There was a certain nobility about his head, and yet at the same time it had that hint of friendly malice to be seen on so many Chinese faces: Buddha when they muse, Mephistopheles when they smile.

After an exchange of politenesses, he ceremoniously offered me a scroll which contained a photostat of a manuscript, explaining that as soon as their little fleet had escaped from the reach of the Reds, a committee of the principal family heads had gathered on his boat, and that together they had drawn up a statement of the reasons which had moved them to their action. Moses himself was the only one who knew how to read and write. He owed that to Buddhist monks who had picked him up, weeping, beside the road; a stream of fugitives had abandoned him an orphan, ten years old, after a raid by the Christian General Feng in Kwangtung in 1922. He had then been educated in the monastery, but the ups and downs of his subsequent life had cast him back among fishermen (his ancestors had been fishermen too). Since then he had hardly ever used the brush again. For two whole days he had worked carefully on this declaration, and the beautiful Chinese characters on the scroll were his. But the text, he assured me, was the work of them all. Everyone had added something, if only a touch, a formula, his own thought on a common experience. The photostat contained not only the Chinese original of this extraordinary text, but also its English translation:

“For generations we have been fishermen. We live on the sea and go where there are fish to be caught. To speak in a general way we might say that we were freer than people who live on land. But no, the Communists *of ten thousand laws* keep inventing new ones to bind us more tightly.

They divided all the fishermen into groups, each group having to work together. No fisherman was any longer allowed to go out to sea alone. Before leaving to fish, the group had to tell the kanpous where it was going to fish and what time it was leaving. The fishermen are then searched in order to find out how much rice they are taking with them. They have not the right to take any larger quantity of food with them. In summer they have to leave

their winter clothes on land, and in winter their summer clothes. As our flight took place in summer we were compelled to leave our warm winter clothes behind.

We can no longer sell our catch as we please. We have to give it all to co-operatives managed by the Communists and at prices fixed by them. The sum due is then not paid out to us in cash, but in credit notes of the 'People's Bank'. Those notes can't be used freely or serve as a guarantee on which to borrow money. All you can do with them is buy your rations in the State shops. Each fisherman receives a piece of paper on which he must write down in Jen Min Piaos¹ his daily expenditure and he has to ask each salesman to make sure the sum is correct.

Fellow countrymen! The sea is vast, but nevertheless we are no longer allowed to move about on its surface freely. We catch large quantities of fish, but we are not allowed to keep even a very small part to supplement our rations. Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh and the other Communist leaders say that everything is for the people, but in fact all the people everywhere in China sweat blood for a few Communist lords. The truth is that everything we catch is for Soviet Russia.²

We have spent six long years under the Communist jack-boot and we have experienced indescribable sufferings. We can now consider ourselves the most fortunate of our four hundred and fifty million compatriots because we have been able to escape and tell our story to the world. When we look back on what we have been through we cannot help shuddering. What is the reason for all the Communist liquidations and requisitions and their exhausting campaigns for this and that, or to read our thoughts? All the reforms on behalf of the workers and peasants which sound so good in the mouths of the Communists are nothing but black characters printed on white paper. But after each campaign a thousand persons among us lost their lives. As one such campaign followed the other you had the impression of going from one purgatory to the next.

We put up with everything it was possible to put up with before we finally decided to escape. On August 25, 1955, the Communists announced they were going to cut down rations in order to lower

¹ The Jen Min Piao is the yuan, or People's Dollar. Ten yuans are worth about three dollars. Tr.

² They firmly believed that this was so.

the consumption of food. It was in order to exchange foodstuffs for arms, they said. They allotted us a daily ration of thirteen liangs of rice (just over two pounds). Children were entitled to half that amount. The monthly ration of edible oil was two liangs. We were hungry all the time and in danger of dying of malnutrition. As we all had families we could not revolt. The only way to save our lives was to flee. But there was no one to take the leadership because no one was allowed to consult with others under Communism, which creates distrust between a man and his neighbours. But when we were threatened with starvation, we took the risks involved in escaping. We knew that if we succeeded we should be able to live, whereas under Communism life is worse than death.

One dark night at about the time of our annual expedition to the Ta Tao Shan and Wan Shan archipelagos, we left at a moment when the Communist guards were not watching us. As soon as the first boat put out to sea the others all followed. We were acting against hunger and against persecution. Our action in sailing towards freedom was spontaneous. We feel sure that if everyone in China had a boat the whole population would flee."

The text, which blended together so astonishingly the accents of François Villon and the aspirations of Thomas Jefferson, moved me so deeply that for a while I remained silent. I read and re-read those plain, straightforward words, set down without art or order, but so warm, so laden with human truth, that I suddenly felt that my own concept of the Communist world was taking shape around it: "the Communists of ten thousand laws . . ." ". . . the sea is vast, but nevertheless we are not allowed to move about on its surface freely . . .", "the reforms are nothing but black characters printed on white paper . . .", "after each campaign a thousand persons among us lost their lives". And finally that last touch, suddenly widening the picture to the whole of China, with its poignant contrast between the sea's horizon and the régime's prison: "We feel sure that if everyone in China had a boat the whole population would flee." And, in spite of all the sufferings, this restraint, this gentleness, almost: "We feel sure . . ." The modest dignity of the ordinary man when he finds himself the mouthpiece of great messages!

I felt as though I had read an historic manifesto on the condition of humanity under tyranny.

Reconstructing the scene of its drafting in my mind's eye it seemed to me that this junk on whose deck I stood was a new *Mayflower*, an Asian counterpart certainly, and a very much poorer vessel, carrying very much poorer people than those Puritans who sailed from Plymouth in 1620. But it was carried over the ocean by the same breath: human liberty. And I was moved too at the thought that the seed of human culture, carried by the whirlwind of war through a Buddhist cloister into the brain of an abandoned orphan, had blossomed thirty-five years later, to accomplish its highest purpose: to lend a voice to the sufferings of the humble.

"How did you manage to take so many people?" I asked Moses.

"Most of us live on board with our families in any case," he replied, "and it is customary for those who have a dwelling on shore to take their families with them on the annual fishing trip to the archipelagos because it is particularly hard work and they require assistance. We had made no previous arrangements on land. That would have been impossible with all their spies. Once we were at sea the idea seemed to spread spontaneously from boat to boat, and I saw with pleasure that the old Chinese spirit was not dead, and that with very few words we were all in agreement. You must remember that since the collectivisation which forced fishermen to make over their boats to the Communists, we were all very desperate. Even the boat-builders and repairers and those who mended the tackle were nationalised. If that at least had served to obtain your machinery it would have been something, but that was not so. They continued to work with the tools they had used at the time of 'the five legendary rulers'; but now a horde of parasites had interposed themselves between them and us, and balked them at every turn with much meddlesome interference so that the artisans on land were even worse off than the fishermen at sea. And because they were instructed men with a skilled trade which was passed on from father to son, they would talk about it in public, and because they were unable to hold their tongues many of them were arrested and deported. We fishermen were more silent, but we were no less active."

Moses was referring to his hazardous adventure, and he had succumbed to the sin of pride.

"You are a sensible man," I said, "and a thoughtful one, so tell me, and tell me in all fairness: did the Communists really bring absolutely nothing but evil to your people? Wasn't there anything at all anywhere that you could put down to their credit?"

"Yes. They wanted to carry out certain real reforms, but as they are fanatics, and blind to everything but their own ideas, they exaggerated everything, and the result was that even their good plans turned out harmful for simple people. For example, one year they decided there should be no more rats and sparrows in China. Now that was a good idea, because we were plagued with them. But why did they insist that it should all be done in the space of one month? I can tell you: it was because the Communist leaders wanted to be able to boast about it in their speeches. Do you know how they went about it with the sparrows?"

"No, I haven't the faintest idea. I have heard talk about that 'Public Health and Hygiene' campaign, but I don't know the details. I shall be very glad if you will tell me about it."

"Very well. They mobilised the whole population—the *whole* population, mark you; men, women and children, old men, workmen, officials, everyone—for three successive days and nights. We had to make so much noise that the sparrows were frightened and afraid to settle anywhere. Finally they fell out of the sky exhausted, and then we killed them all on the ground."

"I must confess that that strikes me as rather ingenious all the same."

"It was nothing new. Our old rulers used to make their subjects do it when they wanted to get rid of the sparrows in the neighbourhood of their palaces. But to do it throughout the whole country meant that for three days the whole population did no work at all. No fishing vessel was able to put out and bring us in our daily ration of fish. On every roof, under every tree, near each post, at each window and in all the streets there were people with rattles, drums and whistles, and if they hadn't anything of that sort they had to shout, because the Governor had not provided us with enough crackers. We had three days and three nights of that, with hardly a wink of sleep. We ate as we stood there, waving our arms and making a noise. On the last day we were all at the end of our tether, but there wasn't much need to shout ourselves hoarse any more since all the children were howling because they had had nothing to eat, and because they were scared out of their wits."

"But I suppose your town was at least cleared of the sparrows?"

"It was astonishing how many we did kill, and for a while there were no more sparrows. But within six months there were just as many of them as before. The wise birds had flown off to safety in the

country, and there they laid and hatched more eggs, so that before long there they were again. The best method of getting rid of sparrows is taught in our ancient books. Year after year you just strew poisoned grain for them. It takes longer, of course, and you need more patience. But does anyone really think that time can be abolished by a decree of Mao? It was much the same with elementary education. In 1951 the Government started a campaign to educate working men in their free time. Now that was a good idea too: to teach people to read and write. But once again they tried to rush ahead too fast. I learnt to read and write with the monks when I was a boy. It took me six years, learning four hours a day. But the Communists claimed that ordinary fishermen could learn to read and write in two years, learning four hours a week. They said they had invented a special system for it. For each of our characters they invented a new one which represented its pronunciation. To me it seemed that it meant that you had to learn twice as many characters as before."

"No, that's not quite true. They wanted to do as we do in Europe. You see, we haven't a different character for each idea, but a different character for each sound, so that in all we have only twenty-six characters to learn, instead of several thousands as you have, and with those characters we can write any word we like by noting the sounds of which it is composed."

"I'm not educated enough to say which way we ought to write, our way or yours, but it's quite certain that the Communists spoiled everything again. For one thing they made our men work so hard at their jobs, and then at political meetings, that when they got to the course to learn to read and write they were too exhausted. If they didn't turn up, they were punished in a most humiliating fashion—sometimes they were made to sweep the streets. And, in any case, half the time at their lessons was taken up by propaganda. You know, the Communists can't see a few people gathered together without automatically starting to make propaganda. It's stronger than they are; it's like the red rag and the bull. Even so, it mightn't be so bad, but their politics are a hotch-potch that no one can possibly understand, full of pompous phrases which suggest that they know absolutely everything about everything, whereas in reality they don't understand shades of difference at all. But you have to learn their phraseology by heart and stuff your head up with a lot of useless lumber, whereas a man would be better occupied learning the ancient Chinese virtues—not to mention eternal things. The result was that even those who went

eagerly to the lessons at first, and really wanted to learn, were finally sickened by it all. They used to come to me and complain."

Up to this moment the others had been standing around and listening respectfully to what Moses was saying, but now it seemed that his words aroused such bitter resentment that they could no longer keep silent, and one after the other they put in what they had to say.

"I would learn five characters one day; but those I learned the next day got mixed up with those I had learned the day before and made me completely forget those I had learned the day before that. I began to feel that to retain a hundred you'd have to open up my brainbox and hammer them inside. But, of course, that was because we were already exhausted before we arrived."

"You can't chew if your mouth is too full, and it's the same with teaching; if you stuff too much in at once you forget the lot."

"At my class we had to listen to political lectures most of the time. After six months of it I was still trying to read one phrase: 'We, the workers, are now the masters of China.' When I went back to my boat I was terribly depressed and I couldn't teach my wife anything as I had hoped to do."³

"As I say, it was a good idea," said Moses, "but I felt it could be done better, so one day I plucked up my courage and went to see the kanpou who was responsible for the lessons. I suggested that it might be a good idea to teach the fishermen characters relating to the sea, like boat, net, fish and port, instead of starting off with words like class, party, imperialism, dialectics, and so on. If looks could kill I would have dropped dead on the spot. The kanpou told me that the Party knew what it was about and didn't need any advice from a man who had been taught by subjectivist monks. Then, to prove how right he was, he showed me a newspaper in which there was the photo of a fisherman and an article describing how he had learned to read and write all the characters in a year so well that he had even discovered a technical error in a scientific work on electronics. After that I didn't say any more; I just bowed politely and withdrew, realising that Communists are incurable. With all that boastfulness, those long words, and that mad rush, it isn't surprising that the campaign against

³ Anyone who might think these men were exaggerating will find plenty of confirmation in *Reference Material on Culture and Education* published by the official government Education Commission.

illiteracy was a failure. But the Communists never let up so they launched a campaign of meetings for educational complaints.”⁴

“What’s that exactly?”

“Well, people turned up at those meetings—voluntarily, so they said—and told us how they had suffered under the old régime because they hadn’t been able to read and write. And they told us hair-raising stories of how working men had been thrown into prison by their bosses because they had been caught trying to learn to read and write; and other yarns of that sort. The idea was to make us all the more keen to learn.”

“But it didn’t work,” put in an old fisherman, “because although we’re very simple people, we’re not as dumb as all that. You could see the whole thing was a put-up job a mile off.”

The constant high pressure at which Communism deliberately operates in whatever it does often causes its undertakings to degenerate into farce. For example, in 1958 they issued a peremptory slogan: “Every Chinese Toiler a Poet too!” The result was a veritable tidal wave of doggerel. “Poems” were sent to the newspapers by the cart-load. And in Szechwan the Communist authorities boasted that their province alone had produced four million poets who between them had composed seventy-eight million poems within the space of four months! In Shansi one factory claimed that its workers had turned out 160,000 poems in record time. What else it had turned out was not mentioned. The usual political meetings were now reinforced by poetry readings and recitations; and before long the factory notice-boards were covered with the lyrical efforts of zealous worker-poets. The whole thing became so fantastic that one couldn’t help wondering whether a good many of these “poems” weren’t turned out, tongue in cheek, as a subtle form of opposition by “over-zeal”; a sort of variation on dumb insolence. Normally the masses were thoroughly gagged. Was this ear-dinning babble perhaps a kind of revenge, a deliberate exaggeration to the point of absurdity—and beyond?

“But that’s how it always is with the Communists,” Moses insisted in conclusion. “Even when the idea is good in the first place they always spoil it. They drive people to distraction, and the whole thing ends up as a farce.”

⁴ The failure of the proletarian education campaign and, later on, of the attempt, connected with it, to introduce the Latin alphabet in place of the ideographs was admitted frankly by the authorities in Peking. But as far as this campaign of meetings for educational complaints was concerned our fishermen’s leader had made a slight mistake in his chronology: they were organised from the start. Cf. the *Kwang Ming Jih Pao*, July 13, 1950.

I4

THE SCHOOLMISTRESS SHUEN, THE MIDWIFE YU, THE FEMINIST MEE, AND A GROUP OF CHINESE WOMEN

THIS time I was to meet a group of women refugees, so instead of arranging the interview in a camp, Fung invited us all to tea in town. A prominent member of the "Reform Club" had been good enough to accompany me, and the evening before he had invited me to dine with him and another member of the club in a restaurant perched high on one of the Kowloon hills—"The Nine Dragons".

Someone whom I reproached for spending his one evening in Hongkong in the cinema instead of taking the trouble to climb one of the surrounding hills just laughed and exclaimed: "But there's nothing to see up there at night!" Nothing to see up there at night? The panorama which I could see below me from the restaurant of "The Nine Dragons" was unforgettable. Four starry heavens were spread out for me: the one above me, two below me, and the fourth within me, a sort of dazzling reflection of the others. The two below me were Victoria and Kowloon, separated from each other by a dark river, an arm of the sea which thrusts itself between the island and the peninsula. They presented two constellations of bright stars as dense as the Milky Way, but with all the fire and colour of a firework display; and because it was a fantasy born of human life it was more moving than any ice-cold galaxy of heavenly constellations. There, a thousand times over, were glowing red Mars, milky-white Venus and the trembling Scorpion; and more comets than man ever saw in the skies. And each one of those dancing rosettes and filigrees led a trembling, palpitating life of its own; striving to attract attention to itself alone, but failing because of the fantastic rivalry all around. And far from debasing that invisible alpine pasture, where only the fiery daffodils could be seen, even the bright advertisement signs added something of beauty to it; for, being unintelligible at that distance, those flashing words were like torches in the sky—so that what was really an exhortation to use this or that toothpaste seemed to be a brotherly message reaching out to man through the cosmos.

It was in this fairylike atmosphere and in the balmy air of a summer's night that I learnt from my amiable host that beneath this magic surface political disputes and battles seethed and festered. The opposition, it appeared, operated under the slogan "Hongkong for the Hongkongese", which was a polite way of saying "Kick out the British!" However, I was assured that the British were quite well liked and even enjoyed a good deal of support, because they did not impose their political ideas on the population, or force them to attend political indoctrination courses, made no attempt at brain-washing and did not encourage delation; because a man could spend the money he earned just as he pleased without interference from the authorities, and because the upbringing of children was left to their parents. The Chinese are naturally good citizens who respect the law—provided that it in turn respects their family life; and the laws of the British in Hongkong do just that and leave their Chinese subjects alone. In fact *this* is their chief source of strength, certainly not their comparatively weak police force with its 5,000 Chinese led by 300 British officers. A police force of that size would be swamped completely in any people's insurrection. But the British authorities take good care not to kick over the ant hill, and the ants are allowed to go about their own affairs in their own way without interference; thus the ant hill never gets upset.

Communist agitators, with the support of certain secret societies, have certainly done, and are doing, their best to stir up the Hongkong Chinese against the British, but after bubbling up once or twice the mass fell back into its age-old quietude again. By comparison, if you got rid of the police apparatus in Peking, the régime there would not last a week. One can truthfully say that the colonialism which prevails in Hongkong does so with at least the passive consent of the people, whereas the so-called "People's Democracy" in Peking survives only thanks to the knout of the dictator.



When I arrived at our rendezvous the next day I found a number of charming Chinese women waiting for me. They were sitting at a long table, each with the customary large glass of fragrant tea before her. There was Miss Shuen, a schoolmistress, perhaps thirty years old, dressed in a European coat and skirt, discreetly made-up and wearing a pretty hat; Madame Mee, rather older, and dressed in a close-fitting gown. She was a graduate of Sun Yat-sen University, and an enthusiast

of the women's movement—not the gymnastic but the political variety. She had played a leading role in the Federation of Democratic Women (Communist), and had been prominent at all its congresses. At a Conference of Asian Women in Peking, attended by delegates from twenty-three countries, Madame Mee made the acquaintance of a kindly young Hindu woman. They saw each other subsequently at a number of such conferences, and they became friends, so that when Madame Mee was in trouble she confided in her Hindu friend. One of the usual campaigns of "rectification" happened to be raging at that time, and Madame Mee felt herself menaced. A close friend of hers, Madame Ting Ling, holder of the Stalin Prize, was accused of individualism, and of having concealed her real hostility to the Communist Party. . . . And if that could happen to a holder of the Stalin Prize, then Madame Mee was no longer safe. The young Hindu was able to assist her to escape.

Then there was another delicate creature with high cheek-bones and almond eyes, who was perhaps fifty years old. She was Madame Yu, and she was a midwife. She had a very lined face but the body of a young girl, and the Chinese dress she was wearing, which normally betrays the slightest tendency to curves, revealed no trace whatever of feminine shapeliness. She had been put on trial for having propagated birth control. In reality she had done no more than carry out the former policy of the Party which had aimed at reducing the birth rate. Unfortunately she had been a quarter of an hour late in appreciating Mao's sudden change in favour of increasing the birth rate.

There was also a much older woman in the company, who was, it appeared, a sempstress. Her name was Madame Oi. There was very little of her to be seen because of the large black satinette pyjama-type garment she was wearing, the typical clothing of older women of the poorer classes in Hongkong. She had been compelled to confess in public to "capitalist cupidity and ineradicable commercialism", because, after the artisanate had been brought into "joint management", she had done dressmaking for private clients at night "for her own profit". And then there was Miss Ying, at eighteen the picture of health, with cheeks like rosy apples. At this point it is worth noting that some of our yellow-skinned sisters do actually have rosy cheeks. In addition, she was very plump, the only really plump Chinese woman I had met on my tour, high-spirited, and very ready to laugh. There were three other rather pretty young women, but there is no point in mentioning their names because none of them said a word

beyond confirming with eager nods of the head and excited little exclamations what their companions said about their exodus.

Apart from the schoolmistress in her suit, and the older Madame Oi in her Cantonese pyjamas, they all wore the typical national robe of China with its high neck and its famous *cheong san*, the provocative slits up the side which reveal the leg sometimes to the hip. The slits in these gaily coloured garments have something of a social significance. A good bourgeoisie will have the slit ending just above the knee; a woman of the people will have hers a little beyond that; whilst a light of love will have hers well up the thigh.

As they were all inclined to be a little shy of each other, particularly with regard to their experiences under the terror—several of them had first-hand experience of those pitiful processions of the accused, the public trials, “self-criticism” and the reform of thought—I preferred to ask them about the day-to-day life of ordinary women under the Communist régime, particularly as I had already heard enough about the terror.

The feature of life under Communism which had left the biggest scar for these women, apart from the terror, was the rationing. For the men it was—again apart from the terror—overwork. The women complained of this too, but for them the daily problem of getting enough rice to feed their families, and in particular the children, was even more important, more worrying and more upsetting.

Those eight women all assured me vehemently that under the Communist régime they had received very much less rice, sugar, edible oil, meat and cotton cloth than under the Kuomintang. I told them that I found that astonishing and I asked for details. The misery suffered under Communist rationing was as deeply engraved on their memory as the arrival of a woman’s first-born, and the details poured out of them in an excited stream. It was not easy for me to follow it all because they used a great variety of weights and measures: sometimes catties, sometimes ounces, sometimes liangs, sometimes lis or yards. I made rapid notes of everything I could understand. It was only later on, with great difficulty, and cursing British particularism in the matter of weights and measures, that I managed to get some sort of uniformity into it all.

It appeared that each person received 350 grams¹ of meat per month, chiefly pork and camel meat, 190 grams of sugar, from 100 to 220 grams of edible oil, according to the district, though, as I

¹ 1,000 grams is one kilogram or 2.2 lb. Tr.

afterwards discovered, the *People's Daily* claims that the ration is nine ounces a month, or 280 grams. But Madame Mee informed me that there were privileged persons who received more. In accordance with an order of the State Council higher officials, from departmental directors upwards, receive an extra pound and a half of edible oil, while a further order issued the same year² provides that ordinary workers must eat sweet potatoes instead of rice. Amongst other rationed commodities are tea—in China!—peanuts, pasties, and even potatoes. Madame Oi declared that in all her life as a sempstress she had never known such difficult food conditions as those existing under Communism—except for a time under Japanese occupation.

"Fish and soya are not rationed," declared Miss Shuen, "but there's no oil to fry the fish in. Chicken, eggs and chocolate aren't rationed either, but prices are so high that such things are out of the question for ordinary people. Fruit is unobtainable. The fruit grown in South China is all exported to Hongkong. And as there is no dairy produce in China, and therefore no milk, you can imagine that it's a real job for a mother to find enough food to feed her family. In fact it becomes an obsession."

If I had not known the nightmare of rationing in France during the Nazi occupation I should not have been able to appreciate to the full the daily sufferings of the Chinese housewife struggling to find even the most ordinary foodstuffs; the anxiety it causes; the fear of missing a distribution; the long queues in the early-morning mist—only perhaps to hear, after waiting for hours and moving along steadily and patiently almost to the head of the queue: "All gone." And then, to crown it all, those campaigns of "socialist competition" to reduce the already miserable rations even further.

Preserved fruit and cakes were brought, and a second glass of tea each. The aged Madame Oi, who was little more than a bag of bones, fell on the cakes avidly. She ate and ate steadily, and she put six lumps of sugar into her tea. You might have thought her a bee collecting her ration of pollen, but, actually, age had given her some care for the future, and whilst the younger women, perhaps from politeness, hardly touched a thing, she ate on determinedly as though intent on making up for the past and stocking up for the future. The younger women were more interested in satisfying my curiosity, and they were all deeply moved to find a "long-nosed" sister from that fabulous part of the world called Europe so interested in them and their troubles, and

² October 25, and November 12, 1957, respectively.

to think that what they had to say would be printed for the use of instructed and important people who knew how to read.

They now turned their attention to their clothing troubles. "Just imagine, Madame: you had a right to only six and a half yards of poor-quality cotton cloth or two dresses—or rather two blue boiler-suits. And seven yards of cotton for knitting—not wool, mark you, cotton! It was wretched. Not that we'd have had any time to knit even if we had managed to get hold of the wool. Because of those terrible political courses, you know. Silk and wool were not on the ration, but they were in short supply and tremendously expensive. A working woman could never buy anything of that sort."

"In short," I interposed, "for goods in short supply, apart from simple necessities, it was the high prices which kept down the demand, so that poor people under Mao were rationed by the purse, just as they are in capitalist countries."

"It's worse than that," said the little schoolmistress. "Suppose a young woman, loving nice things as is usual in a girl of marriageable age, deprives herself of practically everything else and buys herself a silk dress: first of all she would have to go without other things for a much longer period than before. And then, once she'd bought herself the dress, she would be called to account and have to explain how she came into possession of it. Where did she get the money to buy it with? And if it were true that she had saved up for it, why hadn't she bought State bonds instead, as a good citizen should? And in the end she'd find herself taxed as a capitalist. Under Communism only the bureaucrats, whose income is known to be much above the average, can afford to buy themselves luxury goods without having the controllers after them."

"The Chinese don't like the new national dress," said young Ying. "But if you don't want to be treated as a 'reactionary' you've got to wear 'Leninist' dress. That's a blue boiler-suit which shrinks in the wash and soon loses its colour. It's enough to make you weep. After three months' wear they're full of patches and darns. Here in Hong-kong it's different. It's like Paris for women. As soon as you can scrape together a little money you buy yourself a proper Chinese dress."

And at that all the younger women got up to twirl themselves around for my benefit so that I could admire their dresses. They were modest enough creations made of cotton or artificial silk, but they were in gay colours and well cut. They all felt themselves neat and presentable, and after what they had been forced to put up with under

Mao they were happy. According to Charles d'Orléans nature made woman to decorate herself; in any case, it is much harder for a woman to have to dress badly than it is for a man. One feels that in forcing the young women of China to hide their charms under miserable boiler-suits Communism has dealt an unforgivable blow at Chinese womanhood. And in addition to having no nice clothes, it goes without saying that under Mao a working woman has neither make-up nor the slightest ornament. Overwork, under-nourishment and worry are the deadliest enemies of beauty; in consequence all observers, even those favourable to the régime, have registered the disappearance of that very charming creature: the pretty Chinese girl. But it was inevitable that Communism, which is the enemy of man, should cause that most fragrant bough of the human tree, a woman's beauty, to wither away.

"Leather shoes are reserved for the bureaucrats," said Madame Yu. "Working people have to wear rubber ones. I had to stand on my feet all day long, and rubber is terrible for the feet. And the coal you got was of such poor quality that it smoked all the time, which meant you had to open the window, which meant that you couldn't get the room warm. And even children's clothes, as small as they are, were rationed."³

"When I think," Madame Mee sighed philosophically, "that Lenin claimed Communism would free women from the slavery of the household! Actually things are worse now than they were before. The least little thing you want in the house, the sort of thing that at one time you could just walk into the shop round the corner and buy at once, now takes days to get. For example, you can't buy paraffin, or methylated spirits, or petrol for cooking purposes."

"But in the towns at least there are surely gas and electricity for cooking?" I objected.

At that they all burst out laughing, and it appeared that gas and electricity were luxuries you never saw in Chinese working-class homes, even in the towns. The Communists thought it more important to produce steel than to provide either. And as for sewing machines, wireless sets, watches and bicycles, they were all, it appeared, priced right out of the market for ordinary people. Only the higher officials and the Soviet experts had such things.

"Tell me something about housing conditions," I said.

The schoolmistress Shuen had shared a bare room without any

³ Decree of February 9, 1957.

kind of amenities with two of her colleagues. Young Ying had slept in the lowest bunk of three in a common dormitory for students. The midwife Madame Yu had lived with her husband and her four children in one room, three-quarters of which was taken up by the family *khan*. The rest of the furniture had consisted of a table, four stools and a washstand with a jug and basin. The kitchen utensils were all kept under the *khan*. Eight rooms like that, giving on to a gloomy corridor, were occupied by eight families. One spare room with a tap and ovens served as washing-room and kitchen for all eight families. Yu's husband and the four children used to take refuge there when she had to examine a client.

"They say there are going to be workers' cities," said Madame Oi, "but they won't be for people like us; only for *lao-mous*. How can they expect poor women, who have to give birth to children and then bring them up and look after the house, to beat production records? In any case, the credits for workers' housing were very much reduced after 1956, and the plans to knock down the old slum quarters were abandoned."

It appeared that rents were about ten yuans a month, and as the wages earned by women were between thirty and sixty yuans a month, the young unmarried women could not leave home, except perhaps to share a single room with three or four others.

I now turned to Miss Shuen, slim and attractive in her Western get-up, and asked her to tell me something about her particular difficulties as a schoolmistress under Communism.

"We had to work like galley slaves," she said. "Because there was a great shortage of teachers we had to take two classes each, and in the evenings we had to correct the papers. On Sundays we had to prepare the work for the coming week and submit it to our Communist heads for approval. And then we had to attend political meetings, and accompany the pupils to manual labour and to military exercise. You never had a minute to yourself. It was a dog's life."

"And what about the general level of education?"

"Apart from scientific subjects it's much lower than it was before. And it's all so forced, so soaked in politics. As soon as there are more than three members of the Communist Party in any school, they have, according to Article 6 of the Party statutes, to form a Communist cell and organise political courses for the other teachers. And they teach us Leninist slogans as we teach the children the names of flowers. You can imagine that this undermines our authority with the children. Some

teachers rather timidly suggested that education should be left to trained educators and not supervised all the time by the Communist Party, but Lu Ting-yi, the Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, turned that down flat: 'Education for education's sake! That's the slogan of bourgeois education. Those who dare to insinuate that a layman can't supervise the experts, and that the Communist Party doesn't know anything about education, forgets that our Party has proved on innumerable occasions that it is more expert than the experts themselves.'⁴

"It was very depressing to have to hammer the textbooks they provided us with into the heads of the children," Shuen went on. "They are full of political abuse, and terribly aggressive. We had to teach English from a book *An English Manual* which was full of hateful propaganda. Chiang Kai-shek was, of course, a traitor, American imperialism was bloodthirsty, and the Rosenbergs were brave heroes tortured to death."

"At my university," said Ying, "amateur dramatics were popular, but one year there was a play guying those students who weren't interested in politics, another praising the liquidation of the counter-revolutionaries, and a third in praise of the Five-Year Plan. It bored you to tears."

"You wouldn't think you could get much propaganda into mathematics," Shuen went on, "but actually our textbooks were full of it. There was one sum which went something like this: 'In the United States the number of half-starved people is double the number of unemployed, and five millions less than the number who live in hovels. As the number of those who live in hovels there is twenty-three millions, what is the number of those unemployed?' And another one: 'On April 12 thirty-one B29 bombers invaded our air space and bombed the town of Antung. The number of bombs they dropped was eighty more than the number of bombs dropped by twelve B29 bombers on March 31 on the town of Linkiang. The total number of bombs dropped during these aggressive raids was 140. How many bombs were dropped during each raid?'"⁵

"When I saw those little heads concentrating so hard on those venomous problems, with their tongues just showing as they worked, I, who had been so proud to become a teacher, felt deeply ashamed. The Communists have put our ancient Chinese classics into the

⁴ Lu Ting-yi said more or less these words on September 25, 1958.

⁵ For identical problems cf. the *Jen Min Pao* of May 11, 1957.

lumber-room, and they don't even let our Chinese writers write new books for us; they just translate Soviet manuals, like *Lenin and his Bodyguard*; *Lenin at the Barber's*; *Stalin, or the Eleventh Tsai-tseu*;⁶ *Marie Shotwell's Letters to Stalin*; *How Young Russians Study Science*, and so on."

"Po Huai-chi, the Assistant Director of Education in Hupei, announced publicly that many children would have to be expelled from school because they did not comply with the necessary political conditions,"⁷ put in Madame Mee.

"Not only had we to serve everything in a Leninist sauce," Shuen went on, "but we had to extol all the warlike virtues to the children. We Chinese, whose writers so loved peace that they gave us only one character to describe both the soldier and the bandit, now have to glorify that personage to our children. During the school holidays we are made to organise military games, forced marches, visits to military airfields and artillery barracks—with little children from six to twelve years old. And during the halts, we have to tell them stories about heroic achievements and the brave deeds of our police against the enemies of the people. We have to read aloud from books like *The Bodyguard of Yen-an*, *The Total Annihilation of the Enemy*, and so on."

"And when I think," put in the midwife Yu, "that our great Mencius, who lived hundreds of years before Christ, and like Confucius occupied himself with education, said: 'Goodness of heart comes from nourishing the germ of goodness, as good wheat grows from good seed sown in good soil in a good year.' Those ancient Chinese masters taught men to love and respect their neighbours and not to hate them as these do."

"I have been told," I said, "that three per cent. of the adult population of China, or about nine millions, are organised in the Communist Party; and that ten per cent. of the adolescents, or about twenty-two millions, are members of the Communist Youth. What about the children?"

"Forty per cent., or about thirty millions, between the ages of nine and fourteen, are members of the Young Pioneers, in which they are subjected to intensive political, sport and military training. They have to obey five rules, known as 'the Five Loves': love of country, love of Communism, love of labour, love of science and love of State property. But the Communist authorities prevent us teaching children to love

⁶ The Chinese reckon that they have ten Tsai-tseu, or geniuses.

⁷ This declaration appeared in the *Chang Chiang Jih Pao* on September 6, 1955.

their parents, saying that such a thing is a remnant of the former feudalist régime."

Young Miss Ying, with her cheeks blooming with youth and her ideas blooming from her studies, was obviously anxious to put in a word.

"They divided us up into small groups for discussion, and we had to encourage each other to indulge in self-criticism; that is to say, we had to condemn our own ideas on the basis of the current political situation. We should never have dared to do it before a larger audience, but with only a few friends and acquaintances we were much more inclined to confidences. For example, on one occasion one girl confessed to having set a dog on a cat for fun, and this was an offence against the building up of Socialism, so she said. I was foolish enough to ask what dogs and cats had got to do with the building up of Socialism. Our mistress then explained that cats helped in the battle against rats, whilst dogs helped in the struggle against the stealers of State property. That seemed to be that, but the subject came up again at the following lesson, when the political supervisor declared that it was also in the Party line to pursue hypocrites who flattered the Party in daylight but betrayed it in the darkness, therefore if the girl had set the dog on to a hypocritical cat that would have been a good thing. On another occasion a girl confessed that she had spent an hour doing her hair, though at the time there was a Party campaign running under the slogan 'Don't lose a single minute for Socialism'. When all these little groups had had their meetings and their confidential self-criticisms, they were called together for a general discussion, and we all had to confess our faults before this larger audience, condemn the bad thoughts which had led to them, and set out the proper solution."

So children also are submitted to brain-washing, I thought. Brain-washing before brain-stuffing. Once again I was struck by the primitiveness of Communist thought. Because a hundred years ago Karl Marx had uttered a number of observations on the capitalists of his day, since declared "scientific", these poor wretches firmly believed that there was a "proper solution" for everything, even for dressing a girl's hair; and they believed it fanatically; and like all fanatics they were prepared to kill and kill in order to force their beliefs on others. To those dry-as-dust fundamentalist dogmas in their minds came the withering away of all human sentiments in their hearts. In consequence they just hadn't the faintest idea that a properly developed society must be a happy society, and that you can't have a happy society unless

young girls are allowed to spend just as much time as they like on doing their hair.

"Lu Ting-yi, the Director of Party Propaganda, addressed the children over the heads of their teachers, telling them 'to carry out their ideological reform with determination and persistence, to drive all bourgeois ideas out of their heads, and to replace them with proletarian ideas'.⁸ Poor children! How on earth could they be expected to understand what having proletarian ideas meant? It was as much as the grown-ups could do to get a vague idea of it all. And even when they did it was so much the worse for them, because to have proletarian ideas means in effect to have no other ideas than the morose cut-and-dried schematism of the Central Committee."

This was Miss Shuen, but Miss Ying now took the floor again.

"I think the worst thing of all was that we were forced to exercise pressure on our parents. We were taught exactly what we were to say to them at night when we got home; for example, that they must buy State bonds, that they must take part in the socialist competition campaigns, and, if they had businesses, that they must hand them over to the State. You know, it's very difficult for a child who, as all Chinese children do, loves and respects its parents, to do that. I could see that the sermons I had to preach to my father irritated him. I always left it to the last moment, and then after a great deal of beating about the bush I would blurt it out: 'that he would find himself an enemy of the people unless . . .' My father would shrug his shoulders wearily, but when I told him that he should give his business to the State he angrily told me to mind my own business. Then I would return to the subject the next day, and the day after that, because although I was ashamed to have to rebuke my own father I was also ashamed to see him amongst the wicked counter-revolutionaries. Just think of it—I was thirteen at the time!

"Then one day my father was so angry that he boxed my ears. I was going off to school at the time and I arrived in tears. The mistress then wanted to know what I was crying about, but I refused to tell her. But then she formed a little group of my friends to question me, and, because I was unhappy, it all came out in the end. Two days later my father was summoned to the police. When he returned he was a changed man, and occasionally I would catch him looking at me furtively, and with a mingled look of fear and sorrow and reproach.

⁸ Address of Lu Ting-yi to the Third Congress of Communist Youth on April 9, 1958.

After that, if I came in when he happened to be talking to my mother, he would fall silent at once, and it was then I realised that he had been summoned to the police and rebuked on my account. I was horrified. I hadn't wanted to say anything to anybody about the matter, and certainly not to grown-ups, but the girls of my own age had been instructed to worm everything out of me, and I hardly realised what had happened. Now I could see that my father must think I had done it to revenge myself on him because he had boxed my ears. He must regard me as a spy, and I felt heart-broken. I wanted to tell him that if I had caused him trouble it was without intending to; but I didn't know how to begin, so I tried to make him understand in other ways, by glances, smiles, pressing his hand, what I was unable to put into words. Alas, I fear that I did not succeed. One year later the kanpous came for him and took him away and we never saw him again. I can still see my mother broken by despair. I couldn't bear seeing the look in her eyes, so one morning I ran away from home and after many adventures too long to tell I found my way to Hongkong."

This young girl's story deeply shocked us all, and for a moment or two there was silence, which was finally broken by Madame Mee:

"The main aim of Communist education is to wean the child completely away from its family," she said. "But they will never succeed, because it is against nature, and because, as Wang Yang Min has said, 'there is a Confucius in the heart of every man'."

I was deeply moved by what I had heard because I had now seen at first hand the tragedy which the inhuman slogans of "Communist morality" can bring about in the life of a child. Everything in the Communist régime, the school, the film, the book and the newspaper, just everything, tries to turn the unfortunate child against its parents. For example, there is a film which has been shown throughout China in which a "model" teacher instructs her pupil Wang, aged nine years, to spy on her parents. The little girl, wearing the red neckerchief of the Young Pioneers, carries out these instructions, watches the movements of her parents, reports the arrival of an uncle in the house, steals letters, listens at doors, and so on. The child discovers that the uncle is a counter-revolutionary agent parachuted into the neighbourhood from Formosa. She immediately informs the police, who shoot the "uncle" down.

The official organ of the Communist Youth proudly published a letter from a young fellow whose father had lost his land at the time of the agrarian reform. The father escaped "his just punishment as an

exploiter of the people" by hiding in the house of his own parents. His own son now discovered his hiding place and wrote to the journal in question asking whether he ought to betray his father—and the answer, of course, was "yes". The journal then went on to say that if there are still some parents who are enemies of the people it is the task of the youth to destroy them, and to resist the ties of blood in the interests of a greater justice. "Unless your father is too great a criminal," the paper continued, "he will not be put to death, but sent to reformatory labour; and after his thought has been re-educated he will be returned to you. However, should you then see that he has not really been reformed, but has only pretended to be, you must denounce him once again. If he tries to harm you, you must report it to the authorities who will put him in prison. With the great power of the people's dictatorship behind you, what have you to fear?"⁹

I now sought to find some subject which my interlocutors would find less painful: "Is it true that primary education in Communist China, that is to say the education of children from their seventh to their thirteenth year, is not free and has to be paid for?"

The answer was unanimous: you had to pay. Shen Ti-lan had officially declared: "There is no need for the country to provide free elementary education generally."¹⁰ Only twenty per cent. of the places were, it appeared, free. And this was the reason why eighty per cent. of the population of China consists of illiterates. This was the figure given by Chu Chu-mo, a professor at the University of Peking, during the course of the campaign in favour of the adoption of the modern European alphabet.

It seemed that Communist China was still a very long way behind Japan, where free compulsory elementary education has existed since the beginning of the century. And even behind Vietnam, Formosa and the Philippines, where it has also been in force for a good many years now. Communist China still has a very long way to go before it will catch up in this respect even with the other countries of the Far East.

"And how can you teach children seriously and with any hope of success," sighed Shuen, "if they have to do manual labour half the week? It prevents them from concentrating. They are already tired and exhausted before they come to school. In 1957 Peking introduced what it calls work-schools. According to Lu Ting-yi's own words, the idea was to have schools which wouldn't cost the State a penny piece; that

⁹ *China Youth*, November 1, 1955.

¹⁰ *Ta Kung Pao Hand-book*, Tientsin, 1953.

is to say, schools which maintained themselves by the manual labour of their pupils."

"Lu Ting-yi admitted it as frankly and cynically as that?"

"Certainly. And the newspapers did not hesitate to point out that from the economic angle a great deal could be got out of obligatory labour by groups of pupils and students. Such unpaid labour, they wrote, would inculcate a really Communist attitude to labour on the part of the pupils¹¹. All educational institutions were urged to make themselves financially independent by selling goods made by their pupils, or the products of the market gardens run by them. Recreation has been turned into labour stints. Pupils have to do three days' schooling and three days' manual labour.¹² This manual labour can consist of cleaning the class-rooms and the lavatories, gardening, collecting scrap metal, or more systematic labour such as replanting trees in the parks, mending the roads, paving the streets, repairing the school buildings, helping in the work of the local agricultural collectives, or actually working in the local factories."

"When the children help in the work of the agricultural co-operatives," Ying put in, "they have to put on their oldest clothes in order that the peasants shouldn't get the idea that townspeople live better lives than they do. By the way, this manual labour for school-children was introduced even before the end of 1957. In 1955 the professors and students of Peking University had to plant trees and take part in the building of a school. My eldest brother, who was a student of economics, used to complain that after his stint of manual labour he was too exhausted to study properly."

"I lived near Hanyang," said the midwife Yu, "and I saw the pupils doing navvying work near the river which runs along by Liberation Park there. And I remember what a tremendous fuss they made of a *lao-mou* named Ho Yuan-an because he shifted ninety-nine *piculs*¹³ of earth in a morning's work—or it might have been in a day's work; I can't remember exactly any more. In any case, it was a lot of earth to shift. In the same time his fellow workers used to shift perhaps thirty *piculs*, or less than a third his performance. One day they sent a thousand pupils out from Wuhan. It was raining, and the bare-footed children were soon wet through. It was very cold too, and they were

¹¹ Cf. *Wen Hui Pao*, Shanghai, March 28, 1958.

¹² Cf. *The Kwang Ming Jih Pao*, March 15, and May 1, 1955; and the *Wen Hui Pao* of November 26, 1955, reports on the manual labour performed by elementary-school pupils in the Chugui district.

¹³ About five tons. Tr.

constantly blowing into their cupped hands because they were numbed with the cold. No one thought of taking them in out of the rain. That evening two of them were brought in to me with a high fever. 'What do you expect me to do for them?' I asked. 'I'm a midwife, not a doctor.' They told me that I must look after them as there was no room for them in the hospitals. As we had only one *khan* we put the children on that and the rest of us slept on the floor."

"As usual," Madame Mee went on, "disappointment followed enthusiasm. At first they supposed that this 'brilliant' system, as they called it, would incorporate the standpoint of the masses, of the proletariat, of dialectical materialism, but it wasn't long before they had to admit that the actual results of this work-school system were deplorable; the level of studies dropped alarmingly. In consequence they then announced a new revolution in education. Pupils were to work and learn at the same time by a system of reading out loud whilst working—in order to combine learning and production. That was a sensational revolution, as you can well imagine for yourself."

They all burst out laughing, and it occurred to me that Communist brain-washing had not succeeded in driving the spirit of humour out of the Chinese people altogether, which meant that it must be very deeply rooted indeed.

I also remembered the incredible gullibility of the so-called *avant-garde* in Europe who flung up their hands and burst into loud exclamations of admiration at the "educational reform" introduced by Khrushchev. The essential factor of this great historic action consisted of reintroducing productive labour during the course of studies. The world press devoted solemn articles to the "new pedagogical conception" introduced by this great "educational reform", although in reality all Khrushchev's talk about "the admixture of theory and practice" is nothing but pretentious embroidering of the harsh fact that a dictatorship short of labour power is ruthlessly seeking to harness the undeveloped muscles of children into the productive process—because that is the only reason, and a very base one, which lies behind these so-called "new conceptions". Everybody has known for centuries that proper education requires some practical work as well as theory. But it is perfectly obvious that if this work turns from experimental tests into ordinary manual labour for production, then the whole educational system degenerates into a system of exploitation.

"Elementary-school children who do not get at least eighty per cent. of the possible marks at their examinations are sent off into

production," said Shuen. "To some extent that is understandable; a country must have manual workers. But the really inhuman thing about it is that these children are sent to cultivate virgin soil. One day, when I happened to be at a railway station in Yumen, I saw crowds of weeping parents saying good-bye to their children who were being sent away like this. 'It's as though they were being deported,' one of the mothers sobbed to me. 'I have no hope of ever seeing them again.'"¹⁴

THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

I was impatient to question these Chinese women on the one tremendous subject which has not ceased to provide international political literature with matter for discussion since Mao came to power in China—the emancipation of women. Books, articles, reports and meetings have echoed and re-echoed with praise of what is said to be going on in this respect in Communist China. Even some people who do not deny the cruelties of the régime find some consolation in the "historic reform" which is said to have emancipated the Chinese woman from her age-old submission. I had recently read a study by Madame Feng Yung-Ch'ao of the National Federation of Democratic Women, a Communist organisation.¹⁵ She writes exultantly: "340,000 Chinese women are officials of the Communist State, and 40,000 are in the higher grades. In the government itself there are sixty women occupying posts as vice-presidents, ministers, councillors, departmental heads, and so on. There are women delegates in all the popular representative assemblies. In Northern China alone 150 women are presidents of tribunals or magistrates."

And the new Communist marriage law has been praised to the skies for "abolishing the feudal system". Thanks to this new law, we are told, Chinese women can now choose their husbands, whereas before the historic date May 1, 1950, their husbands were chosen for them by their fathers. There were even yarns to the effect that before Communism came to China, many Chinese women, in despair at having given birth to daughters instead of sons, had thrown the newborn girls to the pigs. "How much truth is there in such stories?" I asked my interlocutors. And once again the answer was a burst of laughter, and I blushed for having been so naïve as to repeat such grotesque tales.

¹⁴ *New-China Information Service*, Harbin, May 11, 1956, and the *Kwangming Daily*, of October 1958, both describe this enforced exodus of the children.

¹⁵ April 17, 1953.

"You can read about such things in gruesome fairy-tales, and occasionally in the newspapers," said Madame Mee. "By the way, I once read that an unmarried young French mother threw her newborn child on to a dung heap. But that's hardly a custom in France, is it? Westerners have some queer ideas about us. Because we haven't made such technical progress as they have and because we still respect certain Confucian traditions they seem to think that nothing has changed here for the past 3,000 years. But during the last dynasty the government drew up a modern Civil Code consisting of 245 articles, inspired by the Japanese Civil Code. This would have greatly changed the juridical status of Chinese women, but unfortunately the outbreak of the First World War prevented its introduction. A new code drawn up by the great jurist Wu Ching-hiung was adopted by the Nanking Government in 1928 and put into force on May 5, 1931.¹⁶ The Communists make their comparisons with the long-dead imperial age, and they deliberately ignore all the changes which were made in the status of women under the Kuomintang."

"I should very much like to know how much of their emancipation Chinese women owe to the Kuomintang and how much to the marriage law introduced by the Communists," I said.

As an expert on feminism it was Madame Mee who answered.

"The old imperial law gave the concubine a legal status. She was a member of the family, though occupying an inferior position to that of the principal wife. But Articles 985 and 992 of the marriage law of 1931 abolished the legal basis of polygamy. It had, of course, been practised from time immemorial—at least by the well-to-do. The new law imposed the obligation of fidelity on both the marriage partners (Article 1052) instead of just on the woman. It also abolished certain discrimination against women in the matter of property inheritance. Formerly women had been regarded as unfit to inherit because it was supposed that they were incapable of perpetuating the ancestral cult. Henceforth they enjoyed both property and inheritance rights. The result was that some women at least were able to establish their economic independence (Article 1031). The 1931 law also introduced divorce by mutual consent (Article 1049), and at the application of one of the parties, if it could be proved that the other party had committed certain specified marital offences (Article 1052). Under the old imperial law the preliminary betrothal was irrevocable, and it therefore represented the real contract. But the 1931 law dropped the whole

¹⁶ Law relating to the family, Book IV of the Civil Code of 1931.

concept of preliminary betrothal, and at the same time it laid it down that marriage could be by mutual consent only, and not as an arrangement enforced by family agreement (Articles 792 and 977). Thus the Kuomintang had already emancipated the Chinese woman, and she could no longer be married off against her will. The law also provided for the automatic legitimisation of an illegitimate child if the parents subsequently married.

"The Communist law of 1950 did nothing new when it proclaimed that a woman might not be married without her free consent (Article 1); confirmed the right to divorce under certain circumstances (Article 17); the right to own property and the right to inherit (Articles 1, 10, 13 and 14); prohibited concubinage (Article 2), the drowning of female infants (Article 13) and the practice of *T'ung Yang Hsi* (Article 2).¹⁷ Incidentally these last two clauses were introduced into the Communist marriage law purely and simply in order to mislead public opinion abroad. The only new thing the Communist law did was to change the age of marriage: twenty years for a man instead of eighteen as previously, and eighteen for a woman instead of sixteen as previously (Article 4); whilst substituting a simple Register Office declaration for the previous public ceremony provided by Article 6 of the 1931 law.

"But what it did do was to introduce certain obligations on both parties such as had never previously existed in any marriage code in the world; for example, a mutual obligation to unite for socialist labour and to fight for the construction of a new society (Article 8). I know all this by heart, including the numbers of the articles, because for three years it was my job to assist schoolteachers to explain the new marriage law to the older children at school, and in the evenings to the adults. I probably spoke at hundreds of meetings called to make the new law known. Of course, we had to say that it was the most revolutionary law of all times and all countries, presented to the women of China as a gift from the infinite bounty and compassion of Mao and Communism."

"Unfortunately," I sighed, "some of us were taken in too. I happen to know a Communist trick or two, and I know what Communists are capable of in the way of deceit, but even I believed the story that they had saved women from their previously enslaved condition and given women a new civil status."

¹⁷ An ancient practice according to which on her betrothal a girl went to live with her future parents-in-law, even if she were not yet nubile.

The old sempstress and the midwife now told me that they had been married off by their fathers to men they hardly knew. But that had been in the remote interior and before the 1931 Kuomintang marriage law; and they both assured me that even before 1931 marriage by consent was already the custom in the larger towns. That, of course, was not in itself astonishing, because in matters of morals the law always limps well behind and legalises only those customs which are already well established in fact. On the other hand it is also true to say that in remote country parts the old patriarchal customs survived the Kuomintang law of 1931—as, in fact, they still survive the Communist marriage law of 1950. Indeed, in remoter areas there was so much resistance to the new law that in order not to incur the bitter hostility of the national minorities, the Communists expressly excluded them from the operation of the new law, as it would have upset their marriage customs completely.

"I have had a good deal of experience in these matters," put in the midwife Yu. "No one can dance quicker than the music; and even under Mao there are still parts where the girls are married off by their fathers."

"And by the Party," exclaimed the others in chorus.

"That's quite true, you know," said Shuen, seeing my look of astonishment. "Don't run away with the idea that a woman member of the Communist Party is free to choose her own husband. First of all, she is forbidden to think of marrying any man who is not a Party member. But even if she wants to marry a man who is a member of the Party, she must first get the permission of the Party Secretary."

Shuen then searched in her pockets and produced a press-cutting, which she unfolded and handed to me. It was a collective letter of complaint addressed to a Chinese newspaper, and amongst other things it demanded: "Since marriages arranged by third parties have been abolished in our new socialist society, why must our marriages, as members of the Party, be arranged by political organisations?"¹⁸

What these Chinese women told me about the role of the Communist Party as a marriage-broker was confirmed by Edgar Faure, who is very charitably inclined towards Mao's China: "A young Chinese student fell in love with a young foreigner. Her friends and neighbours and the headmistress of her school did their best to dissuade her, but she resisted them all. The young man consulted his ambassador, desiring to know in what way love was inimical to

¹⁸ *China Youth*, May 24, 1956.

Socialism. The ambassador promised to make a *démarche* on behalf of the young lovers—with the result that shortly afterwards the young girl was transferred to a university many hundreds of miles away.”¹⁹

The interference of the State in the private lives of young couples goes even beyond the limits of the Party. Lucien Bodard records that he was told: “We allow young people to become engaged, but we do not allow them to indulge in sexual intercourse, since that might result in the birth of children, and that would hamper their work. The interests of the State must come first.”

Father Watine, a French missionary who spent several years in Communist prisons for his sins, records having met some strange cases amongst the usual conglomeration of politicals, merchants, workers, religious people, opium smokers, beggars and so on. There was, for example, the young man who was serving a year’s imprisonment because he had had sexual intercourse with his girl friend. And she was serving a similar term in a woman’s prison. And there was also a workman serving a term for having slept with his wife during working hours.²⁰

“They say that divorce is permitted under Communism,” said the old sempstress, who seemed almost intimidated to hear the sound of her voice in the room. “Yes, it’s permitted, but only if they approve of it. I knew a young woman of twenty who lived in the town of Tinghsiang in the province of Shansi. She worked in a clothing co-operative and earned thirty yuans a month. Her husband had left her to go off to the virgin lands, and as she had not heard a word from him for over two years she applied for a divorce. But they told her she couldn’t have one because ‘the departure of her husband for the virgin lands was a glorious deed in the cause of Socialism’.”²¹

“That’s quite true,” confirmed the schoolmistress Shuen, “women are no longer enslaved to their parents as they were in the days of the Emperors, but instead they are enslaved to the Communist Party. Personally, if I’m going to obey anyone, then I prefer to obey my father, because with a father there is always love and affection to which a girl can appeal, whereas the Party has no heart at all.”

“And then,” put in Madame Mee, “you mustn’t think that Chinese women first began to play a role in political life with the arrival of the

¹⁹ Edgar Faure, *Le Serpent et la Tortue*, p. 68.

²⁰ *Chinese Communist Law*, Book II.

²¹ The Chinese press is full of edifying stories of this kind. Cf. in particular Peking’s *China Youth* of January 16, 1958.

Communists; for example, the girl students took part in the students' revolt of May 4, 1919, at a time when the Communist Party did not even exist in China. And they won the right to vote in 1924, even before you Frenchwomen did. They also held many high offices in the State under the Kuomintang, and a number of important towns had women mayors. They played an active role in the campaign against the War Lords in the north in 1924, and subsequently in the resistance movement against the Japanese. It is also true that Article 7 of the Constitution of the Kuomintang—though God knows I don't want to defend it particularly—established the equality of women before the law. It also limited female labour to a maximum of eight hours a day (Article 153) and introduced free education for all children from the age of six to twelve. It is certainly true that not all these favourable provisions were carried out in practice; but do you think that's any the less true of the Communist Constitution? And Article 26 of the Kuomintang Constitution required that women should have a minimum representation of ten per cent. in all legislative bodies. Really, to hear them talk you would suppose that the world had started with the Communists, and that nothing good existed before they arrived.

"And then, the biography of celebrated women who lived even under the Empire contains 310 names. I can't enumerate them all, but for one there was Pan Chao, the sister of a hero of the Han Dynasty 2,000 years ago; she completed the work of her brother and wrote *Precepts for Women*. She's known as 'the lady of poetry and eloquence'. We also had several Empresses who exercised absolute power over the whole country. In the year 300 the wife of the Emperor Houi-Ti led a military expedition. The famous concubine of the Emperor Tai Tsong, Wu, succeeded in becoming the concubine of his son Kao Tsong on his father's death. Then she encompassed the downfall of the legitimate wife of Kao and seized the throne herself. She was followed by the Empress Wei. And on the eve of the revolution of 1911 the throne of China was occupied by the famous Dowager Empress Tsu-Yi. Another famous Chinese woman, Chiu-chin, played a prominent role in the attempts to overthrow the Manchu Dynasty, and paid for it with her life. In civilisations where the woman really is subjugated, such as that of the Moslems, you don't find a single woman of any prominence throughout their history."

I realised that I had touched on a sore point with Madame Mee, who had spent her life in the cause of female emancipation; and that

she was anxious to convince me that women had never been so subjugated and inferior in China as the rest of the world had been led to believe.

"With regard to the education of girls," intervened Shuen, "it is undeniable that as far as *quantity* at least is concerned the Communists have really done quite a lot. As against that, the level to which they have depressed education by mixing it up with their propaganda is almost unbelievably low. And the same is true of the level of servitude to which they have reduced scores of other women. The Communists have dragged women from their households, where, it is true, they led narrow lives, busy with their weaving and looking after their children and their husbands. Instead they have bundled them into production where they have to work according to exhausting norms under a barrack-like discipline. Women now work in heavy industry, in the building trades, and on the railways, where they even drive locomotives. In Ashan over 4,000 women work in the steel works. In Kiangsi over a million and a half took part in the building of embankments along the river Huai. And in the province of Ningsia 100,000 women dug 50,000 ditches in 1952 alone. They often do night work, and they pave the streets and mend the roads—very often with young children strapped to their backs."

And with this I realised that we had got to the bottom of the sack. The real reason for this gigantic display grandiloquently entitled "the emancipation of women" was that the Chinese Communist State needs labour power; the women of China have to be "emancipated" from their households in order to pitchfork them into industry. They have been "rescued from the kitchen" in order to become slaves in the factory. In the West, Mao's apologists see nothing but the first part of the proposition; in China, Mao and his Communists see nothing but the second. It was for this reason, as Lei had already pointed out, that the "explanatory campaign" on the new marriage law took on simply fantastic forms, quite incomprehensible if its aim had been merely to "explain" a reform which was in reality carrying out the wishes of the people. In fact it did nothing of the sort; it was a campaign which set out to destroy the bonds of marriage, and certainly not in order to humanise them, and it was accompanied by great brutality and ruthlessness, which caused many people to commit suicide in despair.

"The Party organises labour competitions between men and women under the pretext that the sexes are equal," went on Shuen. "They try to catch us with this bait of sex equality as an angler catches

fish with a worm on a hook. But the equality of the sexes as I see it refers to human rights, not to labour. It means civic rights, such as the freedom to marry, and educational opportunities. The brains of men and women may be equal, but whoever pretended that the strength of their muscles is the same? If civic rights are to depend on the amount of earth you can shift in a wheelbarrow in a certain space of time, then only big strong navvies should have the vote. In any case, certainly not the fine gentlemen in the Party offices with their lily-like hands. But old men have the same civic rights as young men, and no one suggests they ought to work as hard as the younger men on that account. In our own way we women work just as hard as men already, and the work we do is just as valuable. I wonder if Mao has ever stood over a steaming wash-tub for hours at a stretch. He's certainly never brought children into the world. And that's not called 'labour' for nothing!"

"That ought to put us on a level with men as far as hard work is concerned—even with miners working underground," put in young Ying. "And in any case, for all the good their precious civil rights are, they might as well keep them. The whole thing is just another of their wretched tricks. We're to work like galley slaves to earn the vote. But what good is it when we've got it? All we can do with it is elect *them*, so that they can hold us down even more thoroughly than before."

They were all talking together now, and it was like a cloud of excited sparrows all cheeping at once. It was obvious that the subject aroused them all. Shuen, the schoolmistress, made herself heard above the rest: "Only quite recently 3,000 women of Hsinan in the north of Kiangsu were compulsorily sent away from their homes in order to work in a steel foundry a hundred miles away. They had to leave their children behind in nursery schools. Seven of these women were so distracted at being parted from their children that they jumped from the moving lorries and were seriously injured. And what did the *New-China Agency* have to say about that, do you think? Nothing—except to demand 'severe measures' against those 'reactionary women' in order 'to strike an effective blow against feudal prejudices'.²² In other words, against mother love. Whilst the *Kwang Ming Daily* of Peking reported that detachments of women surveyors were working in the north-west area under conditions similar to those prevailing in the Gobi Desert, living in tents, travelling around on camels, and without enough water to wash or clean their teeth."

²² November 7, 1958.

"There's no doubt that this over-exertion amongst women is responsible for a good many premature births," said the midwife. "Apart from my own experience, which confirms it, I saw statistics which greatly alarmed the Canton authorities because of the increasing number of still-born children, premature births, and fatal cases of child-bed fever brought about by over-work."

"There's been a lot of talk, I know, in Europe and America about Mao's marriage law," continued Shuen, "and when you get back to Europe, Madame, we'd like you to tell everyone that there are other things besides marriage laws; excessive labour, for example, and in that respect the Communists suck us dry."

"I shan't fail. In the meantime, allow me to ask you a few more questions. European and other visitors to Mao's China have come back and reported that prostitution no longer exists there; is that true?"

"It's true on the surface, at least as far as Shanghai and Peking are concerned. But if you care to take a stroll along the embankment in Canton you will find plenty."

"I have been told that in Shanghai there is a special institution for the rehabilitation of prostitutes."

"Yes, there is, though that isn't the right name for it. It's a veritable prison. The girls aren't allowed out, and they do ten hours' unpaid work a day on out-of-date looms. They are not even allowed to talk to each other during the daily exercise in the yard."

"But what about their rehabilitation?"

"That means political lectures and courses, mutual denunciations and public confessions."

"All the same, it was quite a feat to abolish prostitution in such a large town. How did the Communists manage it?"

"Thanks to the denunciations of neighbours and to the street committees. With espionage and delation everywhere, such things become much easier. The eye of the police can penetrate into your most intimate affairs at any time. Just read this for example."

And Shuen handed me another press-cutting which my interpreter translated. Whoever has read that letter in which a woman desperately tries to justify herself for having bought one or two minor items for her personal use will hardly forget it. Here are one or two passages:

"Dear Comrade Editor, I had to wear a dilapidated old jacket for two years all the time; often going to meetings in town. I looked dreadful in it, but when at last I bought myself a new one

the Party Secretary rebuked me for extravagance. And he did the same about my new pair of shoes. But if I hadn't bought them I should have had to waste time making myself a pair, and I wouldn't have been able to go to the meetings. I admit having bought a small pot of cream for my skin and some oil for my hair. But it really wasn't much; all in all not more than twelve yuans. . . . Only the wrist-watch might be considered an unnecessary extravagance. But it does get me to the meetings in good time. I really haven't bought anything I haven't earned by hard work. And if I have spent perhaps a little more than usual today, I shall have to spend less tomorrow. Do you really think my purchases were extravagant?"²³

That letter reminded me of the declaration of the fishermen. Once again the truth emerges more clearly and more graphically in the evidence of ordinary people than in all the pompous and pedantic theses of the bureaucrats.

"The street committees keep their eye on our doings day and night," Shuen went on. "It's enough to drive you mad. Where you live everyone is the police and the police is everyone. You're never safe. At any moment the head of the local office, which is the headquarters of several committees, can walk into your room to demand your contribution to this, that and the other, including the State loans, and quite generally to poke his nose into your affairs. If he paws through your records and finds light music instead of political recordings such as *The First of May* and *Comrades, Work for the Building up of Socialism!* you're in trouble. You see, the Central Committee has discovered that 'the serpent of light music poisons the human soul'.²⁴ And if anyone comes to spend the night the chairman of the street committee immediately informs the police. That's no life, Madame!"

"And the poor people under *Kwantchee* haven't got anything to laugh about either," said Madame Oi, the sempstress.

"Ah yes, *Kwantchee*," I repeated. "The peasant Fan Ling mentioned that to me. So it exists in the towns too, does it?"

"Yes, but it takes on various forms. There was a woman in our street under *Kwantchee*. There was an official notice on her door exhorting people 'to keep an eye' on her. She was given half an hour

²³ Letter published in the *People's Daily*, Peking, January 5, 1957. Cf. also the number of February 1, 1958.

²⁴ Cf. the *People's Daily*, Peking, May 31, 1958.

in which to go home from the factory, have her meal and get back to the factory again. She was forbidden to leave the house except to go to the factory, even on Sundays and holidays."

"At the entrances to hospitals," said Yu, "there are posters representing two beds. In one is a patient with noble features, and in the other a very foxy-looking fellow. And the text says: 'Be on your guard! There are counter-revolutionaries everywhere. Keep your eye on your neighbour and report him!'"

"The long hours spent in bed sick, above all the time of convalescence, are regarded as particularly prone to engender confidence," explained Madame Mee. "They're mortally afraid, and they want to impress the imagination of anyone going into hospital in order to prevent him telling his ward-mates about his sufferings under the régime. The kanpous say that the counter-revolutionary virus circulates more quickly than the influenza germ."

"We'd give anything to be able to return to the good old days before the Communist revolution," said Yu. "Life wasn't easy, I'm not saying that. And we hadn't always got enough to eat, but when we did manage to afford a chicken we could sit down to enjoy it in peace and quiet in the family circle. But nowadays everything is an agonising problem. There don't seem to be any simple little pleasures any more. If you do manage to get hold of a chicken you eat it almost in fear and trembling in case some neighbour denounces you as a capitalist. You're always scared. All the time you've got a guilty conscience, because there are so many things you mustn't do or say. What sort of a life is that, Madame?"

There was silence for a moment or two which was then broken by the reedy voice of Oi, the sempstress: "Those visitors who go back to Europe and tell you Communism has liberated Chinese women just don't know what they're talking about. If they're women themselves they ought to come and live under Mao for a while, not as visitors but like us. And if they're men they ought to send their wives. They'd know better very quickly. What would you say about someone who kept telling you how lovely a cake was and yet never had a bite at it himself?"

"A hypocrite," exclaimed Ying, and then flushed because she, the youngest of the company, had had the last word in front of her elders.

But I felt that it was very consoling to think that the last word exposing Communist humbug should have come, in fact, from the youngest of all, the one whom in particular it was intended to deceive.

JUDGE HAN, THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY SECRETARY TCHEN, AND PROFESSOR TSAI

I ALSO spoke at length to an elderly judge with a mane of venerable white hair who had sat on the bench in the province of Kiangsi; with a university professor who spoke seven Oriental languages; with a man who had been the secretary of one of those so-called "democratic" parties, and who was still quivering from the thunderbolt which had blasted his "democracy"; with a partisan of Sinkiang who had been a sergeant and a hero of the war in Korea and who had ended up by fighting against his former friends; with a Taoist member of one of those famous secret societies, who had paid for his membership with five years' imprisonment; with a young Buddhist monk in his saffron robe with one arm and shoulder bare, and a completely shaven head; with a textile-carder and a salt merchant who had escaped from a Mongolian concentration camp, where they had been incarcerated for having opposed the nationalisation of small trades; with a member of the Kuomintang, a tough fellow who had escaped from a firing squad to become leader of a partisan group in Central China; and, finally, with a Belgian nun and two Belgian priests who had just come out of a Communist prison. One of these priests had been interrogated for four months on end with his hands chained behind his back the whole time—he showed me the scars round his wrists. The other, a florid-complexioned citizen of Antwerp, had suffered the indignity of four public trials.

As it is quite impossible within the limits of one book to reproduce the moving evidence of them all, I have had to synthesise it and confine myself to brief comments on subjects which were not dealt with in the previous chapters. But the bare facts themselves are eloquent and authentic enough.

WHO HOLDS THE REINS OF GOVERNMENT?

I was very interested to know how the government of the country was organised, and it was the former judge Han who helped me to unravel the threads.

"It was not until September 1954 that Communist China had a Constitution," he began. "Up to then the so-called 'Common Programme' adopted in 1949 at the Consultative Conference had served. Legislative power is exercised—formally, of course—by the People's National Assembly, which consists of 1,250 deputies elected for four years; one for each 800,000 electors in the countryside, and one for every 10,000 electors in the towns. The Assembly meets only once a year for a session which may last from a week to a fortnight."

It struck me that it was an interesting fact to rub under the noses of Mao's French friends, who complain so indignantly because the Gaullist Constitution restricts parliamentary sessions to five months in the year.

"This National Assembly delegates its powers (which it cannot use itself) to a permanent committee of sixty-six men chosen from its own members. Chu-teh is the President of this 'Permanent Committee', which also elects the President of the Republic for a period of four years. Up to 1959 the President was Mao Tse-tung; since then it has been Liu Shao-ch'i. As for the executive, it is exercised—formally, of course—by the 'State Council'. This State Council consists of forty ministries and committees. Chou En-lai is its president. However, in reality, all this is mere façade, and it would really be a great waste of time to bother much with it, because behind the scenes it is the Communist Party which pulls all the strings.

"You will certainly know that all the elections which take place in Communist China, no matter at what level of the pyramid, are an utter farce. In his famous article of July 1, 1949, Mao enumerated the categories of people who are disfranchised: landed proprietors, capitalists, suspects, reactionaries and their accomplices (a category which, of course, includes everyone and anyone if it suits the authorities), and he concluded: 'The government will not allow them to vote, to speak or to act as they wish; it will prevent them from so doing, and it will punish them.' One really wonders why Mao goes to the trouble of enumerating those he proposes to deprive of a right which is in any case quite fictitious, because even those who possess this 'right' are not one whit the more influential in consequence.

"According to official statistics," the white-haired judge went on, "two and a half million activists have been specially trained 'to teach' the 278 million electors how to vote. At the beginning of an electoral campaign they carry out a purge amongst 'the sovereign citizens', then they present the list of candidates to be elected. As Communism is full

of solicitude for the sovereign electors, it goes out of its way to spare them the trials and difficulties of doubt by presenting them with only one candidate per constituency—and, to make quite sure, there are loud-speakers everywhere (even in the public lavatories) so that all may know who that is. In consequence you will hardly be surprised to hear that during the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign some of the electors dared to write and complain that 'there wasn't the faintest trace of democracy' in the system, and to point out that 'in capitalist countries the electors are allowed to vote for what candidates they like, whereas in China the candidates are decided on in advance by those in power. The Constitution of our country is a mere scrap of paper . . . all the rights it provides are either fictitious or never granted in reality. . . . The National Assembly can do nothing but adopt unanimously all the proposals placed before it; it meets merely as a matter of form.'¹ That's the sort of language our people used when they were allowed to open their mouths, as they were during those few extraordinary weeks of the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign.

"Who does exercise all power in China then?" pursued the old gentleman didactically as though he were instructing a neophyte. "Well, Madame, the answer to that question was given by our people during that same campaign: 'The Communist Party, which is an Emperor placed above the government, above the National Assembly and above the Constitution. . . . The Communist Party is an august and sacred being. Which of us would dare to oppose this being which holds the bible of Marxist-Leninism in one hand and the fiery sword of the State power in the other?'² The six hundred million Chinese have to be docile subjects subordinate to the officials of the Communist Party; that is to say, to ten per cent. of three per cent. of the population. That is an impossible situation. The totalitarian dictatorship of the Party must be abolished.' And that apparently includes even the Minister for Transport, Chang Po-chun, who complained that 'the Communist Party did not even bother to consult the views of the Transport Minister in the building of the road from Kanting to Tibet, the keystone of the communication plans'.

"Yes, the Communist Party is the master of masters, the sultan of sultans. And even that is saying too much, because the Communist

¹ Once again, I have given whenever I was able to find it, the original text quoted.

² Cf. the *People's Daily*, Peking, August 13, 1957, and the *Chinyang Jih Pao*, June 11, 1957.

Party itself merely carries out the orders of an infinitesimally small group at its head: the Permanent Committee of the Political Bureau, which has seven members: President Mao, President Liu Shao-ch'i, Marshal Chu Teh, Premier Chou En-lai, Ch'en Yun, Ling Pao and the General Secretary of the Party, Teng Hsiao-p'ing. As someone complained during the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign: 'The destiny of six hundred million people, their trials and tribulations, their rewards, their reading and their thoughts, their life and their death, are decided without the possibility of appeal by these seven overlords. And how can they know the actual situation? At best they can make an inspection tour of the Yellow River, and perhaps take a swim in the Yangtze.'

"By the way," said Han with a smile, "that remark about swimming is a somewhat disrespectful reference to an alleged feat of Mao, who is said to have swum twelve miles at a stretch from Wuchang to Hangchow in two hours without feeling the slightest trace of fatigue, whereas everyone else gave up the struggle. 'And even if the seven were to talk to the peasants, the peasants wouldn't dare say what they thought. They would merely praise Mao as a genius. How can you possibly avoid terrible mistakes when such a small number of men exercise complete power?' That's the sort of thing our people had courage enough to say when they were given the chance of opening their mouths."

"But how is power transmitted within the framework of the Communist Party itself?"

"The Permanent Committee of Seven chooses the twenty members and the six candidates of the Political Bureau, and the latter choose the ninety-nine members and the ninety-five candidates of the Central Committee, which appoints the secretaries in the provinces, who co-opt the members of the district committees, who nominate the members of the street and factory committees. It's really all very simple; just like the command hierarchy in the army. It all goes on behind the scenes in the case of the Party though, and outwardly you get the same farce of pre-arranged elections as you do in the civil administration. I sometimes ask myself why they take the trouble to stage those farces." And Judge Han stroked his smooth little goatee thoughtfully. "Because, really, they deceive no one. The dams, the crèches, the model hospitals and so on impress the foreign rubber-necks who come here by invitation and don't realise that it's all publicity merely for their benefit, but the election business doesn't deceive even them, for if there is one fact which is not disputed by

anyone it is that we live under a Communist dictatorship. But that doesn't prevent our seven overlords from going on with their complicated farce while keeping perfectly straight faces. They even go to greater lengths than the Communists in Russia. Not content with the pantomime of parliaments and the carnival of so-called elections, they have introduced a parody of 'democratic' parties."

THE FARCE OF THE "DEMOCRATIC PARTIES"

Since the worthy judge mentioned these extraordinary bodies, I propose to interrupt his own observations to introduce what Tchen has to say about them, and he was by way of being an expert on the point, having been the secretary of one of them. Tchen was a rather timid intellectual with chubby cheeks and the innocent eyes of a child. He told me how, before the Communist revolution, he had been naïve enough to believe the Communists when they said that they would respect the independence of the eight democratic parties, whose names he reeled off for me: the Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang, the Association for National Reconstruction, the Democratic Party, the Workers and Peasants Party led by Chang Po-chun, the Association of Chinese Overseas, the Association for the Study of September 3, the Chinese Democratic League led by Lo Lung-chi, and the Democratic League of Taiwan. It was only afterwards that I realised why he had gone out of his way to mention the names of two of the leaders of these bodies.

"In theory," began Tchen in a low voice, because after many years of microphones and eavesdroppers in Communist China he had grown accustomed to speaking practically in a whisper, "these parties exist to prove the tolerance of the Communist Party, but in reality it is not too much to say that behind the scenes they are kept on a very tight rein. And even when it's their turn to take the stage, they bow humbly to the Communist Party and recite their vows of loyalty. For example, all the presidents of these democratic parties have repeated again and again that 'the acceptance of the leadership of the Communist Party is a fundamental principle' of their organisations. And on July 7, 1956, the President of the Workers and Peasants Party even went so far as to congratulate himself because, as he said, 'the new policy of the Communist Party is a whip to keep the democratic parties in order. We must continue to study Marxist-Leninism and strive to understand the policy of the Communist Party correctly.' On March 16, 1957, the eight parties organised a joint mass meeting at which each leader took

the floor and assured those present that 'our unanimous and most urgent aspiration is to reform ourselves fundamentally and get rid of all our capitalist vices'.

"But those declarations were not sincere," Tchen assured me in his scared little voice. "The democratic parties were reduced to mere façades to impress the credulous; and to such an extent that it was difficult for their officials to find any work to do at all in their offices. I have seen my chief come into the office in the morning and sit there in silence facing his empty trays for the rest of his working day; after which he would go home again. He had to come in and be there, since he might be wanted; sometimes, for example, there was a document to sign, perhaps the text of his next speech. Usually he would sign it without bothering to read it. He dared not fill in his time by reading because of the Party inspectors, and he dared not talk because of the microphones everywhere. The only people who did any work in our office were the police agents, who had two rooms of their own in which they busied themselves all day long with lists of members no one else had ever seen, adding to and subtracting from them according to some mysterious decisions of the Communist Party.

"This farce was exposed to some extent during the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign, and the President of the Workers and Peasants Party, Chang Po-chun, dared to say openly: 'The leaders of the democratic parties are treated like little children, and just about allowed to read their own speeches.' And Lo Lung-chi, the President of the Democratic League, declared: 'Non-Communists sometimes have titles, but they never have any power, since the Communists never allow anyone else to have any authority. We are forced to the conclusion that our job is to be walking corpses and to draw our salaries for doing nothing. In consequence we usually keep our mouths shut.' Even at the time of the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign it needed a good deal of courage to say that, I assure you, Madame. Then, once the other members saw that the Permanent Committee did not immediately hurl its thunderbolt and volatilise the courageous ones who had opened their mouths, others began to pluck up their courage and speak, until soon the complaints had swollen into a great chorus."

Tchen was quite excited now, and his chubby cheeks were trembling. "But the arrival of the thunderbolt was only delayed," he went on, "not withheld altogether, and it was hurled in the end. Chang Po-chun and Lo Lung-chi were accused of having guided the respective organs of their associations, the *Wen Hui Pao* of Shanghai

and the *Kwang Ming Daily* of Peking, off the socialist rails, and to have worked together for their own aims. This was a capital crime, because any sort of united front is high treason unless it happens to be organised by the Communist Party. Ten leaders of the democratic parties, including the Vice-Presidents of the Democratic League, Chang Nai-ch'i, and of the Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang, Lung Yun, were dismissed from their posts. And sixteen deputies of these parties in the National Assembly were deprived of their seats on a charge of 'right-wing deviationism'. And please note, Madame, that this was not done by the National Assembly, which was merely informed of the decision by the President of the Council. Neither the people who were supposed to have elected these men nor their fellow deputies were ever consulted. They take so much trouble to arrange these fake elections that you would think they would take a little more trouble in dismissing 'elected representatives' instead of treating them as though they were hired hands.

"Within a few months of the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign about eighty per cent. of the membership of these so-called democratic parties were 'unmasked' as right-wingers. In the hope of avoiding sanctions, some of them grovelled miserably; for example Ch'u An-p'ing, the editor of the *Kwang Ming Daily*, who publicly announced: 'I confess my guilt before the people, and I throw myself upon their mercy.' Believe me, Madame, that was terrible to listen to, and worse to behold. I still see it in my nightmares. Ten thousand so-called right-wingers, headed by the President of the Democratic League, Li Chi-shen, who was eighty years old at the time, publicly demonstrated their 'repentance'. Li Chi-shen marched at the head of the procession together with thirty-four other old men who had gone grey in the service of their country. And everyone in the procession was carrying a red placard in the shape of a heart bearing the inscription: 'We give our hearts to the Communist Party! We promise to listen to the Party as pupils listen to their master. Long live the Communist Party!' I think that sight will pursue me in my dreams to the end of my days; because, you see, Madame, I was marching in the ranks too, waving my heart-shaped placard."

At that little Tchen turned his head away as though to hide the shame he felt at the things he had courage enough to admit. I wondered what Mao's French apologists, Bourdet, Daniel Mayer, not forgetting Simone de Beauvoir and the like, would say if they were forced to shamble through the streets of Paris waving heart-shaped placards

inscribed: "We give our hearts to de Gaulle! We promise to listen to de Gaulle as pupils listen to their master. Long live de Gaulle!"

THE COMMUNISTS WITH THEIR TEN THOUSAND LAWS

But let us return to the worthy Judge Han, who was good enough to let me into the secret of Communist justice in China. "Communism," he declared, "is the power with ten thousand laws and no legality. And Communist China is the land of ten thousand courts and no justice. No country in history ever established such a complicated judicial apparatus in order to deny the people justice. But form your own opinion. The People's Courts which functioned at the height of the great waves of Communist repression had no jury and no defence facilities. Although the sentence was always decided in advance by the Communist Party it was the people assembled at the 'trial' who had to pronounce it. For example, the *Chungking Daily* reports one case in which death sentences were passed by a crowd of *thirty thousand* people, and carried out on the spot.³ At times when the repression is not flowing at full spate you apply to the ordinary People's Courts, which form a sort of pyramid from municipal level to the Supreme Court. Then there are many other courts: military courts, special transport courts, courts for the protection of economic construction, intermediary courts set up in order, according to the Peking radio of December 13, 1954, to allow the other courts to concentrate on 'the more important political cases and on those intended to encourage production'. And all this does not, of course, include the summary jurisdiction of the police. Ah, then I have forgotten the labour courts in the factories, the mines and so on, whose chief task is to combat infractions of labour discipline."

"I have heard something about them from a workman named Tsong who is a refugee here," I said. "He talked a lot about them."

"These People's Courts are responsible to the People's Assemblies, which choose their presidents. This means that there is no separation of powers as between the judiciary, the legislative and the executive. That is bad enough, but it is far from being all that is wrong with our system of justice. Attached to each court there is a committee of the Communist Party, and the Public Prosecutors must go to these committees for their instructions. As the Communist press laid down very frankly: 'The Public Prosecutors must avoid the dangerous

³ *Chungking Daily*, October 31, 1954.

tendency to take the vertical leadership at the expense of the Party.⁴ You can see what is meant even behind the clumsy jargon, and the subordination of our justice to the Communist Party was frankly admitted in the *Yangtse Daily*⁵ when it wrote: 'It is impossible to talk of justice as an isolated conception apart from the Communist Party. Everything which is in agreement with the principles of the Party is just; everything which is opposed to the principles of the Party is unjust.' And our Minister for Justice was not ashamed to declare openly: 'The most important task of our justice is to serve the economic reconstruction of the country and to reinforce labour discipline.'⁶

"But, of course, our Communist justice has other principles too. For example, international law is an instrument intended to settle international disputes without recourse to force. The director of the International Law Department of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Ch'en Fe-chiang, wrote in the *People's Daily* of Peking: 'When that instrument is useful to us, we adopt it; when it is not we adopt other methods.' And again: 'Not all common-law criminals are counter-revolutionaries, but all counter-revolutionaries are common-law criminals.' Though even this did not prevent our omniscient *People's Daily* from announcing three years later as a higher conception of justice: 'Common vagabonds and thieves must be regarded as counter-revolutionaries.'"

"Have accused persons any rights at all in their defence?" I asked.

"A person charged before a People's Court is entitled to the services of an advocate, but that doesn't mean much, because all advocates 'must regard themselves as primarily responsible to the State'.⁷ That is why the President of the Court, the Public Prosecutor and the defence advocate invariably all say exactly the same thing. There are no pleadings, only an indictment; and the first words of a defence lawyer are always to excuse himself for having undertaken the defence of 'a criminal counter-revolutionary'. He then adds that, of course, he has done so only because he feels that his client, though a criminal, is not hopelessly corrupted, and that there is a faint chance of betterment through reformatory labour. But for that faint hope, he says, he would certainly have refused to take the case. And then, in

⁴ *Inner-Mongolia Daily*, Huhehot, August 4, 1954.

⁵ November 30, 1951.

⁶ Speech delivered on July 29, 1955.

⁷ I found this requirement for defence lawyers set out clearly in the *Kwang Ming Daily* of November 28, 1954.

order to make still more sure that he will not be regarded as a counter-revolutionary himself, the defence lawyer proceeds to do the job of the Public Prosecutor for him. In fact the judicial authorities have decided that it is much more expeditious to put 'the Defence' and 'the Prosecution' into one office so that they can work closely together, 'forming a single core and exercising a unified leadership'. According to the *People's Daily* of April 1, 1954, this system has operated very favourably."

"It sounds like an April Fool's joke!"

"Incidentally, it doesn't matter in the least whether an accused person takes advantage of these curious defence facilities or not. The judgments of these People's Courts are analogous to the burial ceremonies after death. The verdict and the sentence are decided in advance by the Party Committee attached to each court."

There was a sudden gleam in the eyes of Judge Han, and I felt sure something particularly grotesque was coming.

"Jackals claw up corpses," he went on, "but our justice has raised us all to a higher stage than that of those brute beasts. It digs up living corpses; that is to say, the bodies of those presumed guilty. Under the expression 'exhumation' Communism practises 'preventive justice' pure and simple; and the official definition of the procedure was published in the official newspaper of the Party, the *People's Daily*, which wrote: 'Although the accused and his friends are at present inactive and underground . . . there is every reason to believe that at the first opportunity they will come out of their holes again, take their butchers' knives and attack the people. Is it not therefore much better that our courts should exhume them and punish them before they get the chance of acting?'⁸

"And our so-called *avant-garde* justice is not only preventive but often substitutive," Han went on. "Take the case of Madame Ma, who married Chou En-lai's brother in 1931. She was publicly tried in place of her father, who was accused of 'large-scale financial jugglings'; he was eighty-three years old and too feeble to appear in person before the court. Madame Ma was subjected to brain-washing and interrogation for two months in his place, and then she was flogged, quite officially, as a scapegoat for her father."

"As a matter of fact I happen to know about that, because Madame Ma managed to escape abroad, and she told her extraordinary story to

⁸ Cf. the *People's Daily*, Peking, July 18, 1957. I quote the exact words while Judge Han remembered only the meaning.

an international commission of inquiry. But how did it come about that her brother-in-law Chou En-lai did nothing to help her?"

"Ah, Madame, there is nothing more fatal to a leading Bolshevik than to show the slightest sign of family sentiment. If he had gone to the aid of his sister-in-law in any way do you think he would be Premier of China today? But to return to our real subject: in its infinite mercy our Communist justice has introduced a suspended death sentence—for a period of two years. At the end of that time the condemned man will be executed or not according to whether he has shown himself to have been reformed by the labour to which he has been put, and at the same time demonstrated a proper sense of contrition. It was because I was unwilling to pass sentences of that sort that—at my age—I went into exile. And because judges of my generation, archaically educated in pre-jackal days, are unreliable and suppurate old-fashioned humanism at every pore of their old bodies, that Communist justice has enunciated another great principle; namely, that punishment must always precede judgment. And, after all, that is quite logical and normal, because there are no accused in the ordinary sense; each arrested person is *ipso facto* guilty, since it is an established principle of Communist justice that the police are infallible and could not possibly arrest an innocent person. Prison or forced labour in detention is therefore imposed on an arrested person for an indefinite period in advance of judgment. This is clearly a very superior system, because it permits the authorities to adjust the punishment not only to the crime but also to the degree of zeal the prisoner shows in submitting to the reform of his thought."

This time Judge Han could no longer prevent his smile from developing into a laugh. But he quickly recovered his gravity and continued in that rather ironical tone which fitted so well to the general appearance of a gently jovial mandarin.

"Another thing to be borne in mind is that even when a person has once been convicted and sentenced he can at any time thereafter be hauled before the courts again, convicted anew and given a heavier sentence. Take, for example, the case of a certain Lu Chi-wu. He was actually acquitted by the High Court of Anwei, but as this did not satisfy the Communists he was brought before the court a second time, and, despite his previous acquittal, found guilty and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. And I remember reading in the *Kwang Ming Daily* that certain counter-revolutionary Taoists, who had received sentences which were regarded as too light by the Communists, were

brought to trial again before a specially constituted court and sentenced to death. It is impossible to count the number of prisoners, who, having served their terms, are kept in prison indefinitely thereafter by a Communist regulation which abolishes what 200 years of judicial progress achieved in China and takes us back to the days of the *lettre de cachet*. It is a very depressing situation for the Chinese people to find itself in after having two revolutions."

"No pit is bottomless," I said, wishing to console him, but not feeling too confident in what I said, because, after all, this particular pit was a Communist abyss. "One day your country will take her rightful place amongst the civilised nations of the world again."

Judge Han shook his head in despair. "I shall not live to see it," he said. To distract his attention I changed the subject.

"Mao's apologists in Europe assure us that although the Communist system in China may be harsh it is at least incorruptible. Perhaps as a judge you can tell me whether under this admittedly harsh régime public morals really have been purified as they claim. Is it true, for example, that—unlike our bourgeois civilisations—Communist China has got rid of her commercial sharks, profiteers, Black Marketeers, brothel and gaming-house keepers, and so on?"

If I had really supposed anything of the sort, which I did not, I should have been disappointed to learn that the Black Market was at least as widespread and active in Communist China as it once had been in decadent bourgeois France in times of shortage. It appeared that Judge Han had often had to try speculators in tea, silk and rice.⁹ On one occasion rice traffickers in Kiangsu cornered a hundred tons and sold it on the Black Market at four times the fixed price. Part of this rice had been stolen from State stores, another part had been obtained by the theft of ration cards, and the rest by bribing the officials charged with the requisitions.

"There is no doubt whatever, Madame, that many kanpous are corrupt. For example, the falsification of harvest returns is quite common. Kolkhoze officials, hand in glove with these corrupt kanpous, are then able to sell the surplus on the Black Market. And, in accordance with the worst Shanghai traditions, police inspectors can still be bribed too. For example, when raids are planned, suborned officials let the racketeers know in good time, so that when the raids take place

⁹ Cf. the *Wen Hui Pao*, Shanghai, August 16, 1957, for reports of Black Market cases.

they are either not there or nothing is found on them. The police content themselves with arresting some of the smaller fry: perhaps an old man trying to sell a coat as old as himself, another selling laurel leaves for the kitchen. Perhaps the police then fashion a wreath of laurel for their noble brows. In any case, they go off with their bag, and the real sharks start up their trade again, offering real silk, sewing machines, gold watches, and so on."

After what I had heard from Lei on the obverse of Communist planning in China, I was not surprised to hear Judge Han tell me that the directors of State factories often opened up clandestine workshops on their own account, referred to in the press as "spontaneous manufacturies", producing anything from baby-linen to machine-tools.¹⁰ In his official capacity the worthy judge had sentenced a number of these go-ahead business men to terms ranging from two to six years' forced labour. These particular offenders had set up their own works with machinery stolen from the State, whose raw materials they then made up. One of them had transferred twenty-six orders of the State to his own "Black" workshop. Another had lured skilled workmen away from the State factories by offering them higher wages.

I also received new confirmation that under Communism, contraband, an eminently mercantile offence, had developed tremendously, but with this difference, that, poverty being far more oppressive in Communist China than in any capitalist country, the "contraband" was far less important, consisting of such things as razor blades, tooth-brushes, saccharine, pharmaceutical products, ball bearings, fountain pens, woollen goods and so on.

"If my memory serves me rightly," Judge Han continued, "there was a case with which I came into contact where four million yuans' worth of illicit goods were brought to Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang. And one of the dailies reported that several hundred thousand instances of contraband were discovered in the years 1950 to 1957.¹¹ You look incredulous, and, of course, such black flowers of economic anarchy don't seem to fit at all well into the mythical garden of Communist planning. But you have irrefutable proof in the fact that this clandestine trade in contraband goods became so widespread that the Communist Party had to launch a special campaign against it,

¹⁰ *New-China Agency*, Shanghai, October 8, 1957, denounces these "spontaneous manufacturies".

¹¹ It was the *Kwang Ming Daily* of July 2, 1958. The exact number of cases reported there is 290,000. The *Liaoning Daily*, Shanyang, of April 2, 1958, also reports similar cases.

starting in January 1958 and culminating in a special exhibition on July 10.

"Corruption also has its fixed place in the Communist world. Between January and October 1957"—at this point the judge paused for a moment, obviously searching his memory—"approximately 1,700 officials were convicted of defalcations. The offenders, all highly placed, since no others could have done it, cooked their accounts and pocketed the difference. *China Finance*¹² of May 7, 1958, contains a report on a rectification conference held in a People's Bank in Kweichow, at which forty-one employees confessed to having been guilty of defalcations, of giving false receipts, of having forged signatures, and so on."

"So in reality neither Bolshevik discipline nor intensive brain-washing has been able to free China of the evils that go with money and the hunt for it?"

"That's because the example comes from above. We have an old Chinese saying which has its counterpart in the West: like master like man. But there, whoever imagined that a dictatorship could be a fruitful ground for the civic virtues?"

THE "HUNDRED FLOWERS" BECOMES A HUNDRED THOUSAND COMPLAINTS

The reader will remember that extraordinary respite in the long history of Communist repression in China which lasted from May 15 to June 8, 1957, and has since gone into history as the "Hundred Flowers" campaign. The former Communist official Ku had shown me the background of the strange affair, which, so he insisted, was a carefully prepared trap from the start. But whether one shares this view or not, and whatever Mao's motives may have been in loosing, perhaps unwittingly, this vast flood, one thing at least is not in doubt: *the authenticity of the criticisms to which it gave rise*. We have, in fact, already seen that the landslide did not begin to move until people had seen for themselves that *real* criticisms of the régime were being published *without alteration*, and that those criticisms bore the stamp of authenticity. And, in fact, it would be manifestly absurd to suppose that once ordinary men and women had decided to take the great risk involved in speaking their minds, they would then *invent* complaints instead of talking plainly of the things which were really troubling them and their neighbours.

¹² A fortnightly financial journal published in Peking.

Thus, whatever their original motives, and whatever their intentions, the Communists themselves have unwittingly vouched for the truth of the abuses brought to light by their "Hundred Flowers" campaign. It is precisely this which makes those revelations so immensely valuable a source of information concerning the real nature of the Communist régime in China. And it was this, too, which made me examine with such eagerness the generous harvest the former Communist official Ku placed at my disposal; though, because of space considerations, I can quote only a minority of outstanding examples thrown up during those astounding three weeks in which the profound resentment of the Chinese people against their Communist rulers was able to express itself.

The Communist Party itself was the focal point of all that suppressed resentment; small wonder, therefore, that as soon as the Chinese got a chance of making themselves heard, the Communist Party became their target. The former editor of the *Yangtse Daily*, Chien Feng, wrote:¹³ "The Communists have created a reign of terror far worse than anything perpetrated by any feudal dynasty in the past. Everyone lives in fear, and before long he is even afraid of himself. . . ." Miss Lin Hsi-ling, a Peking student of law, having described the Party officials as corrupt, continued: "During the purges of counter-revolutionaries the Party committed gross excesses and persecuted the innocent. It unjustly condemned 720,000 people. But despite all those monstrous judicial errors the Central Committee has never criticised itself." And again: "Those people who have lived through the movement of the three and the five antis shudder when they look back on it. At that time anyone could be cited before a mass court at the mere decision of a partog. And that was much worse than prison, It was enough to make people counter-revolutionaries who were really nothing of the sort."

Those mass trials at which the accused had to condemn themselves made me think of the Christian martyrs of Ancient Rome—it was as though they had been compelled to provide their own lions.

"The responsibility lies with the Communist Party, which has played the role of a secret police towards the people. Its spies are as numerous as the hairs on a tiger. . . . The crimes, brutalities and boasting of the Communists, who think they are little gods, have become insupportable. . . . The three specific faults of the Party itself, bureaucracy, subjectivism and sectarianism, are more deleterious than the

¹³ *Yangtse Daily*, Hankow, January 8, 1958.

'right-wingers'. . . Eighty per cent. of all Communists are mercenary and they regard their career merely as a means to procure them well-being. . . . The offices of the Party are hotbeds of sectarianism. . . . Their dossiers are life and death records for ordinary people." And Wang Tang, himself a member of the Communist Party, even went so far as to charge Mao publicly with having adopted "Stalinist methods".

And it would seem that nepotism flourishes on Communist soil quite as vigorously as under the Empire. "When a Communist becomes head of an office, his wife almost invariably appears as head of the personnel department." There are many complaints of the privileges Communists enjoy: they are promoted too rapidly, they are given special facilities for the education of their children. "Because they are anxious at all costs to preserve their own privileges many members of the Communist Party are really Conservatives, Reactionaries and even Counter-Revolutionaries."

The members of the Communist Party are also bitterly reproached with being "cruel", with "having not a trace of human feelings", with being "ice-cold", with being unable to judge non-Communists "except from the standpoint of the class-struggle". "As soon as a young man becomes a member of the Communist Party he also becomes pretentious and arrogant." According to a former editor of the *Tsing Nien Pao* of Tientsin "the relationship between the Communist Party and the masses is that of cat and mice".¹⁴

Among the many confidences Chinese refugees made to me there was one in particular, and it recurred again and again; how much they had suffered from the icy arrogance of Chinese Communist officials. In fact I was astonished to learn how rapidly, once they had come to power, the Chinese Communists had developed all the offensive and brutal traits of a ruling class. I have often heard refugees say things as though they were the most natural in the world, and altogether a matter of course, things which would appear grotesque in those countries where Communists are as yet still in the opposition, such as: "The Communists despise us because we are poor." I remember in particular the remark of one old Chinese refugee: "They squash us underfoot as though we were ants. It's worse under them than it was under the Empress."

As was to be expected, many of the complaints which were heard during the "Hundred Flowers" campaign referred to worsening living

¹⁴ Cf. the *People's Daily*, Peking, June 19 and 29, 1957.

standards for ordinary people. "The Party will never convince the people that they are better off, and that they should be happy, when, in fact, it is, for example, so difficult to get meat that most of the butchers' shops have closed down, when the price of vegetables is leaping up, and when the peasants are suffering constant hardships. . . . The agricultural policy of the Party has been responsible for the starvation of many people. . . . The food policy of the Party is worse than that of the Japanese during the occupation years."

Lung Yun even declared: "The Party agrarian reform has plunged the countryside into bankruptcy." And Professor Hsu subsequently had to suffer three public condemnations at his own university for having dared to say: "The Chinese Communist Party is solely an instrument for the exploitation of the masses."

And it was not only the intellectuals who could read and write who complained. Ordinary workers were also not slow to express their grievances once they got the chance; and one of them wrote: "In order to better yourselves you had no consideration for us. You didn't care for our well-being and health; you made us work twelve hours a day, and you took away our Sunday rest; and then you squeezed still more out of us as 'voluntary labour', and as 'gifts offered to the State'. Isn't this a new form of Communist exploitation?" When the helm swung again back to the old course, this workman in particular, who had signed himself "eloquent worker", was held up to general execration as "a typical bourgeois individualist" and "a mangy sheep in the working-class flock".¹⁵

But in the meantime the critics even attacked the régime itself. "The present Communist system is not the people's ideal. . . ." "The Soviet system isn't necessarily a good thing for the Chinese people. . . ." "Marxism is an anachronism: it applies only to those conditions which existed in Europe in the nineteenth century." The criticism of Communism's claim to have introduced a "classless society" was formulated by Miss Lin Hsi-ling, a law student of Peking University, who wrote: "Neither the Soviet Union nor Communist China has abolished class distinctions. Socialism does abolish class distinctions, Therefore neither the Soviet Union nor Communist China is really a socialist country."

A veteran of the "Long March" wrote bitterly: "The Chinese people overthrew Chiang Kai-shek, but several million Chiang Kai-sheks have appeared in his place. How much longer can the

¹⁵ Cf. the *Shensi Sian Daily*, October 31, 1958.

Chinese people support this burden?" And Professor Wang Teh-chou wrote: "Our leaders complain that the Party has divorced itself from the masses; it would be truer to say that the masses have divorced themselves from the Party. That is why the Party will ultimately perish. It is easy enough to turn machine-guns on to the people in the event of trouble, but one day the machine-guns may be turned against those who fired them."¹⁶ Another professor, Ko P'ei-ch'i of Peking, wrote bluntly: "Six hundred million Chinese live in China, and the vast majority of them are non-Communists. The country belongs to these citizens, not to the Communist Party. If the Communist Party persists in thwarting the interests of the people then the masses will revolt, kill the members of the Party and overthrow the Communist power. No one could rightly say that the overthrow of the Communist power at the present moment would be an unpatriotic act because the Communist Party is serving the Chinese people badly. . . . If the Communist Party perishes, China will not perish."

Thus the very short incandescence of the "Hundred Flowers" campaign cast a bright light into the darkness in which six hundred million souls were buried. If, after listening to these authentic cries from the heart, anyone can still contend that Communist China is really "People's China" as the Communists claim, then he belongs to one or other of the two categories Jean-Paul Sartre has created for men of bad faith: slovens or cowards.

THE REGIMENTED INTELLECTUALS

It was Professor Tsai who first made me aware of the unbelievable ravages wrought by the Communist police in the sphere of art and letters, and of the terrible personal tragedies involved. Professor Tsai, who courageously defended his students who had demonstrated against the Communist Party, had just time to flee and escape the vengeance which would have engulfed him during the campaign against the 'Right-wingers'.

Tall, thin and a trifle arid, he spoke quietly, almost timidly, with that modest little cough which, in the British at least, tends to suggest intellectual scruples. He reminded me of a certain canon of the Anglican Church I once met who began almost every sentence with some such apologetic phrase as: "I'm afraid I must confess that it seems hardly possible to deny that . . ." This hesitant manner of speech

¹⁶ Cf. the *People's Daily*, May 31, 1957, and the *Chong Kou Tsing Nien Pao*, Peking, July 12, 1957.

formed, so far as Professor Tsai was concerned, a curious contrast with the extraordinary nature of his experiences, for Professor Tsai had fought shoulder to shoulder with his students to defend the last redoubt of freedom of thought, which was being steadily reduced by Communist encroachments. I had a strong inkling that in that unequal battle he had played a much more important role than his modesty was prepared to admit. That heroic but little-known battle of the Chinese intellectuals against Communist domination was the story of David and Goliath all over again, but this time unfortunately with a different ending: it was Goliath who triumphed, and little David who left his mangled body on the field. As in Hungary and Poland, many men primarily interested in the things of the mind showed an astonishing courage and fortitude in the face of danger and disaster; and many of them paid for their temerity with their lives. But their fight against Communist intolerance has not found the same poets to celebrate it as did the fight against the intolerance of the inquisition, and the trumpet of freedom sounded with their last breath by the intellectuals of the Communist countries produced no echo in the outside world. Worse still, many of those who should have been the first to answer the call were too busy hobnobbing with the inquisitors. But let Professor Tsai himself take up the tale:

"Madame, it is the depressing story of the remodelling of thought amongst China's writers and artists that I am going to tell you. That expression 'the remodelling of thought', together with the related one 'the intellectual purge', was coined by Mao Tse-tung himself in a speech delivered in Yenan. Like all despots, Mao found enough hangers-on to do his bidding. All he had to do was dispense his largesse and the recipients made up for their lack of talent by willingly becoming his intellectual panders. The man who headed the mob of intellectual boot-lickers in Communist China was Kuo Mo-jo. Remember that name, Madame; history has very few examples of the genre to show more pitiful than that one. While Stalin was still alive this man first drew attention to himself with a sickeningly panegyric piece of doggerel. Just a moment; I'll show it to you. . . ."

And Professor Tsai repeated that poignant gesture I had seen so often among the refugees, who carried with them, and would carry with them for the rest of their lives, folded, stained, buried deep inside a well-protected pocket, some documentary proof of their innocence, or of the infamy of those who had injured them; just as an aristocrat who has fallen on evil days might carry around the scraps of the old

parchment attesting his former elevated state. Professor Tsai produced the poem of Kuo Mo-jo for my inspection:

“Long life to Stalin!
 You have lived seven myriads of years counted
 as terrestrial years!
 You have lived seven other myriads of years
 counted as astronomical years!
 You have always existed; you will always
 exist!
 You do not change as dialectical materialism
 changes!
 You do not change as historical materialism
 changes!
 The immortal Marx lives with you.
 You and Marx are equally immortal.
 The immortal Lenin lives with you.
 You and Lenin are equally immortal.
 Compared with you atomic arms are as
 nothing!”¹⁷

“That gentleman is the supreme arbiter in literary and artistic circles in China today,” Professor Tsai assured me wryly. “He is the Mercury of the Central Committee, whose orders he transmits and whose maxims he enunciates. For example: ‘The prime task of the writer is to educate the people in Marxist-Leninism.’ Or: ‘The artist must elevate himself to the heights of Mao’s thought.’ Or: ‘No scientist can work fruitfully until he has learned Marxist-Leninism.’ And so on.”¹⁸

“And all the intellectuals stood tremblingly to attention, thumbs to the seams of their trousers, when the master spoke—until that incredible day when the revolt of Hu Feng took place. But we mustn’t race too far ahead before we’re ready,” added Professor Tsai hurriedly, uttering a positive barrage of deprecatory little coughs to indicate his apologies for having allowed his feelings to run away with him for a brief moment. “Let us get the facts in their chronological order. One fine day a novelist named Shao Yeh-mu produced a new novel dealing with the ups and downs of a certain married couple, both members of the Communist Party; she a real Tartar and he a real

¹⁷ *New China Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3.

¹⁸ Declarations of Kuo Mo-jo, October 25, 1951. Cf. also *Pravda*, March 3, 1953.

blackguard. The work was badly manhandled by the critics, who unanimously belaboured the author for having presented married life under Communism as one long series of petty squabbles and dirty tricks, instead of as joint labour for Socialism and mutual correction. He was practically denounced as a counter-revolutionary because he had perversely risked creating the impression among his readers that all Communists were of the same kidney as his 'hero' and 'heroine'. He was abused and vilified in terms that I don't care to repeat in the presence of a lady.

"This novel triggered off the first great campaign for 'the reform of thought' on a national scale, and the august Mao Tse-tung placed himself at the head of it. His speech at the Consultative Conference was followed by a meeting in Peking organised by the Federation of Art and Letters. The Vice-Minister for Culture, Chou Yang, whose real business was the direction of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, addressed the eight hundred artists and writers assembled before him: 'The time has come when the ideological confusion which exists in art and literature can no longer be tolerated. . . . Lacking a militant point of view and a healthy conception of discipline our art and literature have degenerated.'

"That was probably in October 1951, and the speech was followed immediately by the adoption by all newspapers of a permanent section entitled 'Movement for the Reform of Thought by Means of Self-criticism'; and every day thereafter the 'confessions' of intellectuals were published under this heading. They were all very similar. A writer would announce that his mind had been poisoned by his upbringing and his feudal past and by his study in the West, but that he now deeply regretted all his errors and recognised that although he had previously thought himself progressive he had really been very backward and had been unable to distinguish between right and wrong. He now realised that art and literature must have a Marxist-Leninist basis and become a weapon in the hands of the working class. Some of these public penitents also confessed that, like petty bourgeois, they had worked for fame and fortune, and not to serve the State. Others confessed that they had shown no interest in anything but abstract problems. But one and all they concluded their letters by expressing a firm purpose of amendment and the hope of complete reform."

As he described one by one these persistent attempts to debase the character of the creative artist, the features of Professor Tsai, already

drawn and emaciated, seemed to fall in still farther until in the end he reminded me of one of those bare and tortured trees in a modern *avant-garde* painting.

"Madame," he said sadly, "it seems to me that objective truth requires me to admit that it took less than three years of Communist tyranny to turn these proud revolutionaries and elegant performers on the dialectical tight-rope into mere door-mats at the disposal of the Communist power."

"Console yourself," I interjected. "It took no longer than that for our samples to turn themselves into Communist door-mats too—and without the excuse of repression."

"But the unfortunate thing, Madame, was that many thousands of artists and writers who had not gone over to the Communists had to go through the sausage machine too, until they were regarded as conforming to the strict definition enunciated by Chou Pei-yuan: 'The reformed intellectual is recognisable by his readiness to abandon all independent creative work in favour of work given to him by the Party, and to remain in the tow of the Communist Party.'¹⁹ The campaign ended in July 1952 with the banishment of a great number of intellectuals to the fields and factories for manual labour 'in order that they should learn to share the lives of the masses'.²⁰ The number of writers, artists and other intellectuals who had to submit to this 'reform' of their thought in this campaign was estimated at twenty-five thousand.

"For the moment things seemed to have calmed down again when suddenly a new storm blew up in connection with the famous love story of the eighteenth century, *The Dream of the Red Pavilion*."

The story in question is a Chinese version of the age-old romance of Romeo and Juliet, and the fate of the star-crossed lovers has made generations of sensitive Chinese readers weep salt tears. The handsome Chia falls desperately in love with the beautiful princess Lin and declares his eternal passion, which is matched by an equal feeling on the part of the almond-eyed Juliet. But the harsh family council refuses to bless the proposed union, and when the beautiful princess, whose health is so delicate that she can exist only on swallows' nests, hears the terrible decision, she goes off into peals of hysterical laughter and gives up the ghost. In the face of this disaster the handsome Chia can no longer live in this world, and he becomes a monk.

¹⁹ *Kwang Ming Daily*, April 8, 1952.

²⁰ *People's Daily*, Peking, July 31, and October 3, 1953.

"Like many other literary critics, Professor Yu Ping-po devoted his life to an erudite study of this drama," Professor Tsai continued. "For perhaps the tenth time he wrote a scholarly essay on the theme, but this time the year was 1953 and the revolution was watching over the purity of literary and artistic works. Therefore our literary policeman Kuo Mo-jo did what was expected of him: he let loose the ire of the Party and its literary hangers-on against the unfortunate professor. A literary pander under his direct orders, a certain Li Hsi-fan, was chosen to fire the first broadside. 'You have seen absolutely nothing in the story but its decadent side,' he accused the Professor. 'For you it is nothing but a love story and a description of the twelve beauties of women. You have completely failed to see that in reality it is a work of social protest against all the forces of oppression.' And that sort of pedantic rebuke went on for pages. After which it was reproduced throughout the press; and writers, critics, professors and journalists were compelled to hold meetings in all towns throughout the length and breadth of China to add their voices to the condemnation of Professor Yu Ping-po, who now desperately tried to rehabilitate himself by self-criticism, constantly revised and improved. But it was no good, whatever he said he remained evil.

"Of course, most of those who were attacking him did so out of fear in order to protect themselves. In their hearts they were panic-stricken, because they were afraid that the reverberations of the affair were in reality the harbingers of a new purge, and they were right. They knew that its victims were already chosen, but they did not know which of them were on the dreaded list. They therefore all progressively humiliated themselves in the desperate hope of turning the lightning away from them; something like your Jansenists, Madame, who spend their lives in zealous good works, although they firmly believe that salvation is predestined and is granted or refused irrespective of anything a man may do in this world.

"But after this second campaign for the so-called 'reform of thought' things again returned to normal—only to be blown to smithereens by the Hu Feng affair. Hu Feng, Madame, that is another name to remember; even more than the other, and for a very different reason. It is a name which does honour to China and to the human race. Hu Feng was a Fellow Traveller from 1920 on. In 1953 he became a member of the National Assembly and editor of the Communist journal *Popular Literature*. Perhaps relying on his old-established friendship with Mao he dared to open his mouth against the

humiliations which were being imposed on creative writers and artists. 'The regimentation of thought which is at present going on in China is not much different from that which took place in Germany under Hitler. Things have got so bad that we can't cough without someone making a note of it. After which it becomes the subject of an investigation.' He described Communist literary circles as 'gatherings of vampires' and condemned Mao's own words in Yenan as 'primitive fetishism', though this latter was said under the rose, and we did not hear about it publicly until it was revealed in the press in 1955.²¹

"In the ordinary way and according to the rules of the game Hu Feng would have been denounced, and then he would have grovelled in the dirt begging forgiveness and protesting his fundamental loyalty to the Party. But Hu Feng refused to play. Still worse: instead of accepting the role of penitent sinner, he became the accuser. Before a full conference of the Writers' Association, he demanded: 'Why have they been so indulgent to the real reactionaries? I will tell you. It is because they have surrendered all personality, and because they crawl on their bellies.' And then he enumerated what he described as the five daggers plunged in the hearts of writers: Marxism, demagoguery, the reform of thought, the uniformity of style, and the politicalisation of their work. That, Madame, was a historic date in the struggle of the human spirit against conformism.

"Of course, after that the pack was let loose. He was no longer referred to as 'Comrade' Hu Feng, and he was abused as a 'degenerate', and a 'viper that bit the hand that fed him', and so on. He was also suspected of having inspired the scandalous novel of one of his followers, *The Swamp*, which dealt with the love story of a Chinese 'volunteer' with a Korean girl. 'It is an odious defamation of the army. Our soldiers fight; they have no time for love,' was the mildest condemnation. After that 'Working Committees' were formed everywhere for the express purpose of 'criticising the ideas of Hu Feng'. At the same time ordinary people were brought together in hundreds of meetings to demand 'the punishment of Hu Feng'. The *People's Daily* published sixty-eight letters allegedly written by Hu Feng and his friends, most of them forged, however, to suggest that they were really disguised agents of Chiang Kai-shek and, of course, of the United States. A mass meeting of two thousand writers and artists met under the chairmanship of Kuo Mo-jo to demand that 'the criminal activities of Hu Feng and his followers should be pitilessly punished'.

²¹ Cf. *People's Daily*, Peking, May 24, 1955, and *Ta Kung Pao*, May 28, 1955.

'In accordance with the will of the people', as he put it, the Chief Public Prosecutor announced on July 22, 1955, in a session of the National Assembly that he had ordered the arrest and trial of Hu Feng. What the sentence was we don't know, but it is quite clear that from that moment on Hu Feng was a dead man on leave."

For the first time the face of Professor Tsai showed a little colour. The story of the man who had become the literary paladin of China (which I later verified) obviously filled him with enthusiasm.

"But there's an obverse side to all things," he went on, "even to the undertakings of the Central Committee. The high courage of Hu Feng, even in the face of death, and his staunch refusal to do public penance gave the campaign against him a boomerang effect. In their heart of hearts more and more people began to sympathise with him, and he became the secret hero of many. The Communists were well aware of this, and the *People's Daily* fulminated against 'the many people who secretly sympathise with Hu Feng although they publicly condemn him'. And that was right. It is difficult to say why the Communists haven't shot him as they have shot so many others. Perhaps because they still hope that in the end they will be able to brain-wash him so thoroughly that he will recant.

"On June 9, as though deliberately to mark the opening of the 'One Hundred Flowers' campaign, Hu Feng was released, though very discreetly. But the significance of that gesture remained as evanescent as the liberty allowed during that campaign, because no one knows what has become of him since. Perhaps the night which surrounds him outside prison is as deep as that which surrounded him within. I don't think it is saying too much if I tell you, Madame, that he honoured me with his friendship."

Professor Tsai fell silent for a moment or two, and it was obvious that he was inwardly paying homage to a venerated name before some secret altar of his own. After a short while he continued—amidst little coughs that his emotion rendered even more nervous.

"There is no aspect of art or thought into which the Communist police does not thrust its nose, Madame. For example, a young working man of twenty will be angrily reproached for having bought a record of light music and played it to his friends. Other workmen are encouraged to fight against this evil of recreational music by denouncing those who hum banned airs such as *Little Rain*, *Chinese Night*, and *Roses are blooming everywhere*. Over fifty musical and cultural centres throughout the country have undertaken to ban such

frivolous music and to sell only Communist tunes and songs. And the Peking Symphony Orchestra has created 'shock brigades to combat the enemy'.

"Our songs, our operas and even our folklore are all defaced by this Communist vitriol. For example, for the year 1954 alone the Writers' Association set up a programme for 'the revision of ten novels, eight plays and three long poems'.²² And the egregious Kuo Mo-jo announced proudly that 'dozens of Chinese ballads and operas are being revised'. In the future the action of our classic plays will be held up for the insertion of scenes taken from the campaigns of the three and the five antis, the production of steel, or the merciless hunting down of counter-revolutionaries. And the ancient God of War, Kwan Yu, is represented as killing the U.S. President Truman, with our ancient knights bursting into a chorus of praise for Mao."

I was unable to prevent myself from laughing, but I quickly stopped at the sight of Tsai's sad face. For him the thing was too serious for laughter. The funny side of it all was killed for him by the five daggers of Hu Feng, wielded by Communism to kill his friends, kill the human spirit and kill his world.

"All the time writers, artists and sculptors are under pressure to write, paint and sculpt nothing but themes 'which encourage production', 'extol the benefits of collectivisation', 'praise the Heroes of Labour' and 'give the Marxist-Leninist point of view'. On its part, the Association engages itself to help its members 'to write better', and, above all, 'to acquire the proper ideology'. The lectures of those professors 'whose ideology is not quite right' are prepared for them by others, who explain to them how they must analyse the literary characters. Production quotas are also fixed for literary and critical work. Kuo Mo-jo was very annoyed to find that all his thousands of writers hadn't produced anything worth while between the lot of them—for which there was very good reason—and so he invented ways and means to keep their noses to the grindstone. Each writer is instructed to produce at least ten works of literary value 'helpful to the construction of Socialism'; and the editor of *Popular Literature* was instructed to write ten pieces for children off the reel. The woman writer Hsien Ping-sin, author of *My Self-Portrait*, *Canal* and other works, was given the choice of 'writing eight hours a day, or going to work in a mine'."

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²² *Kwang Ming Jih Pao*, February 19, 1954.

During the course of the "Hundred Flowers" campaign the hatred of the students and intellectuals for the iron heel of Communism and all the stupidity it involved in the cultural sphere had at last some chance of expressing itself; and it was the students of Peita—as Peking University is called—who delivered the first assault against the Communist Bastille. Peita, which was also at the head of the movement of May 4, 1919, symbolises the spirit of revolt against Reaction, represented in 1919 by the old traditional China, and represented in 1957 by the Chinese Communist police State. In May 1957 the students of Peita demanded the withdrawal of Communist control at the university, the right to study freely, and the removal of higher education from the hands of people who had no real thought for anything but their own advancement.

These students wrote: "The Students' Association is nothing but a government tool, a mere police station of the Propaganda Department. Present conditions are much worse for art and literature than they were under the Kuomintang. . . . The social science of capitalist countries should not be rejected out of hand; it is not all bad."

Hu Po-hui, a student of the Medical Faculty, wrote the following touching letter: "They don't teach us general knowledge such as every university student should have, like the rudiments of Chinese history and that of foreign countries, or the conditions of life which exist abroad. Our progress is measured by our ability to learn by heart a certain number of abstract political formulas. General education is neglected and its place is taken by invented dogmas without any personal application. . . . Even the criticism of dogmatism is itself sullied by dogmatism. . . . There are too many books which students are not allowed to read. Although the forbidden books may not be Marxist they nevertheless contain valuable knowledge accumulated throughout the course of human history. . . . There really isn't much reason to be proud of being a university student nowadays, because the education we get under Communism isn't of university standard at all."

The professors of Nanking University compared Communist education to "the intellectual dungeons of former days", and with "obscure medieval cells", and they demanded that "intellectual activity should no longer be at the mercy of the Communist Party". Writers referred to their "bitter intellectual sufferings", to "the humiliations" they had been subjected to during the campaigns of repression, and to the "rod of iron" the Party wielded against them. A

film director in Shanghai complained that the Communists who were sent into his studios were more like police spies than actors.²³

"Let me finish what I have to say," concluded Professor Tsai, "by quoting you the moving words Lu Hsun wrote in the preface to his book *Hua Kai Chi*: 'If the access to the Palace of Literature is through such narrow doors, and is coupled with such vexations of spirit, then I prefer to go out into the desert to see life itself with my own eyes in all its barren nudity.' That is exactly what I said to myself, and that is why you see me here in Hongkong, where at least I am able to breathe freely. You must have lived under a totalitarian régime to realise just how much the spirit of man needs oxygen—as much as it needs blood."

THE REPRESSION OF THE RIGHT-WINGERS

"The respite granted to us by the 'Hundred Flowers,'" went on Professor Tsai, "was followed very quickly by a terrible storm of repression. It descended on the heads of all those who had been imprudent enough, or naïve enough, to accept the invitation of the Party to criticise its behaviour. They now all found themselves condemned as 'right-wingers', and it was not long before all that was left of that unexpected blossoming of hope was a heap of withered stalks and dead petals.

"The signal for the change of policy was given on June 18, 1957, by the *People's Daily* when it published a speech by Mao himself which set up 'the six criteria' beyond which any criticism of the Party must be regarded as intolerable. However, at first, it looked as though this new campaign of repression was not going to be quite so savage as those which had preceded it. At first there were only 'attempts to persuade', followed by a certain number of dismissals. But it was not long before the strings were pulled tighter and the tone became more savage; and then the former dignitaries now in disgrace began to disappear altogether."

"If I understand you aright," I interposed, "this campaign of repression against the right-wingers finally developed into one of those vast flood-tides which Ku described to me so vividly?"

"Yes. It proceeded in three phases: detection, unmasking and the extortion of 'confessions'. The whole population of the country was divided into 'Leftist Friend', 'Waverer' and 'Infamous Right-winger'.

²³ Cf. *New-China Agency*, Tientsin, August 4, 1957, and the *People's Daily*, Peking, July 29, and November 29, 1957.

The Right-wingers themselves were redivided again into four categories: those who had criticised openly from the first public meeting on; those who had not criticised until the Party insisted; those who had criticised maliciously; and, finally, those who had refused to criticise at all. For each category there was a graduated list of punishments."

I was surprised to learn of one or two categories from the lips of Professor Tsai which had escaped even the very thorough summing-up of the bank clerk Chang.

"No social class was spared," the professor continued. "They did not all perish, but they were all affected."

From various formulations the professor used from time to time it was clear to me that he was well acquainted with the style of La Fontaine, and I discovered subsequently that the famous French fabulist was greatly admired as being closer than any other foreign writer to the Chinese literary genius. It struck me that there was a good deal of truth in this; the resemblance was very strong. There were the same delicate descriptions of the countryside and of animals, the same elliptical method, the same moralising intention and the same allusive references to the sovereign.

"Some authors were 'purged' for having spoken too much of Goethe or Rousseau, and too little of Marx and Engels," the professor went on. "And some mathematicians were similarly persecuted for having maintained bourgeois ideas such as: 'Pure mathematics have their basis in reason, and therefore they may be developed if necessary without reference to physical demonstration.' Journalists were castigated for having said that newspapers should publish all the facts, and, in particular, the commodity prices. The students of Peita were attacked for having published a 'reactionary' magazine *Square*, and for having made 'malicious' attacks on the Party. Judges were dragged through dozens of mass meetings for having said: 'We arrive at our verdicts and change them again without the slightest respect for the law. But politics are politics, and the law is the law. Justice should not be affected by the class war.' Some of them were punished for having pronounced inadequately severe sentences 'on the pretext that the offenders were minors or aged'.²⁴

"And even the exemplary former capitalists, those who had

²⁴ Cf. also the *Kwang Ming Daily*, Peking, September 11, 1958; *N.C.N.A.*, June 8, 1958; *People's Daily*, January 18, 1958, and December 12, 1957; and *Wen Hui Pao*, May 3, 1958.

begged the State to expropriate their businesses and allow them to stay on as managers, but who were now largely to be met with—if at all—sweeping up the floors, or in charge of the cloakrooms of their nationalised businesses, now came forward and accused themselves of being the accomplices of those treacherous elements who had exposed themselves during the ‘Hundred Flowers’ campaign. The purge also swept away certain officers who had openly complained that ‘an abyss’ had been created between the army and the people, or who had recommended ‘the avoidance of all provocations in the interests of peace’.²⁵ The representatives of the national minorities, who had been particularly vociferous in criticising the heavy hand of Peking, were belaboured for having demanded ‘that the mosques should remain outside the jurisdiction of the Communist Party’, and attacked for allegedly having come together in counter-revolutionary organisations under the guise of religion, for having spread ‘false rumours’, for having prepared armed attacks on Party buildings, for having slandered Communist China by calling her a colonialist country, for having denounced their own good Communist compatriots as Chinese tools, and for having demanded independence.²⁶

“Even those who crawled to heel and made fawning retractions hardly escaped. As an example, Madame, let me quote you if only a very small part of Professor Yu Ping-po’s retraction as printed in the *People’s Daily*. And Professor Yu Ping-po is, you must remember, one of the luminaries of Peking academic life: ‘At the time I considered that my “subjective” point of view was in accordance with objective reality. I realise now that I cannot divorce myself from the point of view and the methods which are correct, and that I must adopt a realist attitude and a realist point of view. I have often considered problems in a formalist manner, so much so that unconsciously I separated Marxist-Leninism from the objective facts. . . . With the assistance of my comrades I have taken a resolution to reinforce my ideological understanding, and to reform myself humbly in a realist fashion.’ And so on, and so on, Madame.”

“While we are on this point, Professor, it does look to me as though the general character of this particular wave of repression was not so bad as that of those sinister and bloody campaigns which marked the early years of the revolution. Isn’t it true, at least, that the arrested

²⁵ Cf. the *People’s Daily*, Peking, March 1, 1957, and November 27, 1958.

²⁶ Cf. the *Liaoning Journal*, March 1958, and the *People’s Daily*, December 26, 1957.

men were not shot out of hand, but sent to the outlying districts to be 'reformed by physical labour'?"

"Yes, that is true. From the autumn of 1957 on, the typical punishment was to be sent away for forced labour on the land, in the mines, in the forests, and to build roads. In a sporadic way this method of punishment has been in use for a long time, but it has now become the main method of punishment, and the death penalty, though still used, is not used so frequently. The wave of repression first affected those who had dared to write at all during the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign, then it spread to those who read with pleasure what had been written, and finally it extended into a vast campaign of repression *sui generis*. Among the intellectuals sent away to forced labour were rectors of universities, professors, headmasters and schoolteachers, and innumerable students. A group of eighty-five professors from Peking, including the rector Chang Wei, a sociologist of world-wide reputation, Fei Hsiao-t'ung, and the editors of the magazines *New Door* and *Popular Literature*, was sent away to work on collective farms.

"The novelist Keh Ming is now working in a mine. The well-known woman writer and critic Ting Ling, a member of the Communist Party since 1934, whose husband was shot by the Kuomintang, and who is herself a Stalin Prize Laureate, is at present cleaning the floors of the institute in which she once shone—in order 'to bring about her reform by manual labour'. Her offence was that she proposed to investigate 'the seamy side of life in the New China'. Her works, which were once regarded as the pinnacle of revolutionary literature, have since been removed from the curricula and from the library and bookshop shelves. Many painters have been deported in groups for periods of from two to seven years 'in order that they should be given an opportunity of learning to know the life of the people for the great benefit of Socialist Realism'."

"I have read that this method of sending subversive intellectuals away to forced labour has not proved altogether an advantage for the Communist Party, since 'far from reforming themselves by work in the villages they tried to reform the villages'. It would seem that there is no possibility of a compromise between the intelligentsia and the Communist Party, and that in the end the one must totally destroy the other."

At that the face of Professor Tsai, which had reminded me of that of the Knight of the Doleful Countenance, now softened into a smile.

"The law also had its generous batch of purges," he went on.

"Many judges, including Presidents of the High Courts, and Public Prosecutors, were dismissed and expelled from the Party—and that automatically means the loss of their homes and the loss of their precious ration books. And the number of civil servants sent away to forced labour is innumerable, and it includes provincial governors and vice-governors, and the presidents and vice-presidents of provincial assemblies. In addition, about sixty members of the National Assembly were deprived of their mandates, and ten members of the Permanent Committee were expelled. The army suffered too, including a number of departmental heads of the General Staff. Even the police did not go unscathed, and among the victims was Chu Hsing, the Vice-Minister for State Security. At the Eighth Congress which opened on May 23, 1958, twenty-one heads of permanent committees in the provinces and three candidate members of the Central Committee were expelled. All the rural organisations of the Communist Youth were similarly purged.²⁷

"But perhaps you would like some proof that I am not exaggerating? Very well, on September 25, 1958, the Central Committee adopted a resolution, which you can find published in the press, pointing out that 'although almost a million intellectuals and civil servants were sent away to work in the fields and factories after the "Hundred Flowers" campaign, in order to reform their thought by manual labour, millions more have remained behind in the towns still at their posts but under an obligation to take part in manual labour in the production process for a certain period during the year'. It is estimated, Madame, that about three million people were removed from their posts as a punishment and sent to the outlying provinces of Heilung-Kiang, Kansu, Sinkiang and Inner Mongolia."

I found it difficult to believe my ears, and I wondered what Claude Roy, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean-Maurice Hermann, and the other apologists of Mao were waiting for. Wouldn't they care to join their Chinese comrades and shoulder a pick in the great cause of the reform of thought? Here was a unique chance of embracing the pure spirit of history. It would cost them only a few callouses to remodel their thought, and undoubtedly provide the rest of us with more sensible works on China than those we have had from them so far—with their physical labour limited to packing and unpacking suitcases.

²⁷ Cf. *Communist Youth*, January 30, and 31, 1959.

THE PARTISAN MA, THE CAMPS, AND
THE RESISTANCE

MY PRINCIPAL sources of information as far as Chinese Communist prisons are concerned are represented by the two Belgian priests who, having been let loose from that hell, preferred to stay with their former fellow sufferers in the camp at Rennie's Hill. The partisan Ma was my chief informant with regard to the Chinese Communist concentration camps, and he also gave me information about the resistance and the revolts which have taken place. Ma was perhaps the most extraordinary of all the refugees with whom I came into contact. Through him I discovered that among the people of China, whom we are generally inclined to regard as composed largely of physically insignificant and pedestrian little specimens, there are men with the build of athletes and the courage of lions. Ma's muscles threatened to burst through the thin stuff of the pyjamas he was wearing, his powerful legs might have served as the columns of some ancient temple, and his keen eyes were like searchlights in a perambulating fortress. And when he talked, which he did in a calm and assured voice, the ideas that he expressed were serious, considered, intelligent and courageous. And when I subsequently heard his story, a series of extraordinary adventures, I was no longer in any doubt: I was in the presence of the Ulysses of modern China.

At the age of sixteen he had organised the rear-guard of the "Long March" together with a company of young athletes like himself; crossing the Yangtsekiang, which is not far short of two hundred yards wide, by swimming across with clothes and pack—and then returning three times to help exhausted comrades over. At the age of thirty-two he had fought in the Korean war, and his exploits had brought him two decorations. But as he had been among those units which had helped to organise the anti-American bacteriological swindle, he was refused permission to return home when the war was over. Instead he was sent with the rest of his comrades who knew too much to guard the prison camps in the desert of Sinkiang. Resentful at this ingratitude,

and disturbed by the horrors he now saw every day, he lost his temper on one occasion and struck an envoy from the Central Committee, whereupon he found himself on the wrong side of the barbed wire. After six months of this he made a sensational escape with a dozen or so of his old comrades, who were also imprisoned for various offences, and joined the partisans, very quickly becoming one of their most remarkable leaders and organisers. Deciding to leave China in order to get into direct touch with Formosa he travelled through the whole country from resistance to resistance group, reached the frontier under cover of night, stabbed a police dog which attacked him, waited in the darkness for the frontier patrol which he knew would come up to investigate the noise, pitched a hand-grenade into the middle of it, thus causing the searchlight to concentrate on the spot, whilst in its indirect light he bounded towards the frontier and found himself on the far side of it within a matter of seconds. That was Ma.

I do not propose to spend a great deal of time on what the two priests and Ma had to tell me about the prisons and the prison camps of Communist China. First of all because the horrors they reported would make readers feel sick, and secondly because the facts have already been adequately recorded, analysed and carefully substantiated in the *White Book* of the International Commission of Inquiry into Concentration Camps, and also in a number of books written by missionaries who went through those horrors themselves. I shall therefore confine myself here to a rapid and summary account of this major event in the martyrdom of man.

According to the estimates of these refugees and of the studies I have mentioned, about fifteen million Chinese died of privations or maltreatment in the Chinese Communist concentration and forced-labour camps. To which must be added, to draw up a full balance of the Communist terror, another fifteen million of happier victims, happier because they were killed rapidly before open graves during the mass repressions.¹ The *White Book* records numerous admissions made inadvertently on the point by official Chinese Communist sources, for example in the official *Regulations for Reformatory Camps* issued on September 7, 1954, in Peking, which provide, among other things, for the administration of the prisons and camps by the police and not by the judicial authorities. It also enumerates various degrees

¹ And, still further, there are the ten million "dekulakised" peasants and artisans who were dispossessed of their goods and who died of starvation. Cf. the declarations of the former Communist Ku, and the table on page 50.

of forced labour, ranging from penal concentration to itinerant camps situated here and there at this or that site, and whose inmates are added to by *ad hoc* raids on suspects, unemployed workers, beggars and homeless people.

All the evidence concerning the interrogations intended to break the prisoners both morally and physically and to obtain "confessions", concerning the prison régime with its spells of "mutual correction", with thirty prisoners packed into a cell five yards square, forbidden to lie down during the day or move at night, subject to corporal punishment, to solitary confinement in punishment cells, whilst their families outside are blackmailed to turn against them—all this evidence dovetails in a convincing fashion, and echoes and re-echoes through many of the stories told in this book.

As far as the concentration camps properly so-called are concerned, the following gives us a succinct picture of what life in them was like before the year 1955. According to Ma, since then things have not been quite so bad:

Twelve hours' work a day at a forced degree of intensity; four hours of political indoctrination, self-criticism, and mutual denunciation; one hour for meals; and five hours' sleep.

Five hundred grams of food (just over a pound) per day, very much like, so one of the Belgian priests told me, the swill our peasants give to the pigs on their farms.

To sleep on: bare planks raised in tiers approximately eighteen inches in between each. Though prisoners often slept on the bare floor.

Hygiene and medical care: one shower per month; one doctor for every 10,000 detainees. No medicaments at all. According to Ma, a prisoner who fell ill had one chance in ten of recovering. During epidemics the sick were not isolated from the rest, and moribund prisoners were often buried with the dead.

Discipline: harsh and implacable; floggings, sometimes to death; terms in the punishment cells and in chains for daring to look through a transom or turn one's back on a guard; political offenders and common criminals herded together; spies and *agents-provocateurs* everywhere.

State of health: discoloured hair, failing sight, softening bones, loosening teeth, swelling legs, great loss of weight, limbs like matchsticks, the body covered with sores. Attacks of paralysis were common, and often prisoners who had seemed quite vigorous would simply drop dead.

It is not difficult for the reader to recognise the sinister traits of Mathausen and Buchenwald. They no longer exist in Germany, but they still flourish in the Communist world—and not very far away from our own civilised comforts either! And to think that there are intellectuals in the West who canvass your admiration for the organisers of these hells on earth! Nothing is missing to make them hells, and certainly not torture. Those ex-prisoners I spoke to and those who gave their irrefutable testimony to the *White Book* have described the torture in horrifying detail: a victim is bound, and then a swab soaked in paraffin is stuffed into his mouth and set alight; red-hot irons are forced directly into the bowels of the victim; a man will be buried head down in the ground with only his legs in the air and left to rot. A former officer of the Kuomintang who fell into Communist hands told me that large quantities of water had been forced up his nostrils, and that he had been forced to crawl around bare-kneed over broken glass. Another prisoner told me how he had been forced to swallow human excrement. Burial alive is a common form of execution. And so on, and so on, in a long list which makes Dante's imagination pale into insignificance.

After hearing the long story of these atrocious happenings, many of which, I repeat, were confirmed by an International Commission of Inquiry, stories which made me feel ill, and, above all, sick at heart, I recalled the shocked looks of our so-called *avant-garde* intellectuals, Mao's good friends, at the idea that there had been cases of cruelty and torture committed against the Fellaheen in Algeria by French interrogators. They were a hundred thousand times less frequent than those inflicted by their friend Mao, but—make no mistake about it—I condemn them as indignantly as I condemn the others. But for years these friends of Mao were Stalin's friends too, and then one day they heard from the lips of a witness whose evidence not even they could call into question—no less a person than Khrushchev, the present leader of Russia—that their friend Stalin had brutally maltreated and tortured vast numbers of people in the way you have just read about Mao. And they didn't utter even one tiny squeak of indignation! And today they fall over themselves to demonstrate their friendship for the new hangman Mao, without bothering their pure hearts and minds in the least about the well-authenticated existence of mass torture in Communist China.

But at the same time, and against an evil infinitely less widespread, they strike postures of great moral indignation—and then they hurry

off to Peking to wine and dine with the most abominable torturers in history. When I left the camp at Rennie's Hill, still shaken by what I had heard, and revolted at the hypocrisy of Mao's Western friends, it became clear that those Tartuffes are not entitled to be treated with kid gloves; and that it was my duty to call them by the names they deserve, my special duty because I had seen the victims and contracted the obligation of publicising their martyrdom. Deliberately, therefore, and with a full knowledge of the significance of my words, I say that those who denounce cruelty and ill-treatment inflicted on Fellaheen prisoners, but ostentatiously fail to brand the infinitely worse and no less cogently authenticated treatment meted out by the Communist régimes, and by the Chinese Communist régime in particular, are worthy only of contempt.

POLITICAL RESISTANCE

An old Chinese peasant once asked me: "Why does Chiang Kai-shek bother to drop leaflets on us? We know more about what's going on than he does. Why doesn't he drop us arms instead?" Others with whom I spoke told of acts of resistance, not only in words, but in deeds. But I was puzzled when they talked about such things, because it seemed to me impossible for anyone to rebel under the all-pervading terror the Communists have clamped down on China. I began to feel that with time and distance distorting their memories they were exaggerating one or two desperate outbursts of victims driven to distraction, and turning them into revolutionary actions. But when I met Ma he provided me with details which showed me clearly that those other refugees had not been exaggerating. And subsequently, primed with his information, I gleaned numerous admissions in the Communist press itself. Then came the revolt in Tibet to confirm it all.

At the time of the "Hundred Flowers" campaign, Ma told me, the students formed clubs with the motto: "A few flowers and a thousand weeds." They refused to attend the political courses and lectures organised for them, and they distributed pamphlets and leaflets condemning the Communist Party. One of these, *The Relay-Baton of Democracy* published by the students of Peita, appealed to the people to "fight against their real enemy", the "real enemy" being, of course, Communism. The students of the University of Canton circulated a demand for the public trial of a partog who had driven a professor of physics to suicide by constant persecution. And even in the Russian Faculty of Peita posters appeared proclaiming: "We accuse the

Communist leaders. . . . It is better to die than to live in a world in which man eats man. But before we die let us fight against the enemy!" And Ma roared with deep-chested laughter when he quoted the horrified comment of the *Kwang Ming Daily* of August 9, 1957: "And to think that the authors of these monstrous things are to be found among young people preparing to go to the Soviet Union to continue their studies!"

In June 1957 both the professors and the students at the Faculty of Medicine in Harbin went on strike and drew up a twenty-point programme demanding, among other things, the end of the Communist dictatorship, the formation of a coalition government, freedom for education and a quashing of the proceedings against Hu Feng. That is a programme as moving as the one drawn up by the students of Budapest. Instead of Rajk, the name was Hu Feng. That was the only difference.

As though a great wind of change were sweeping throughout China, students in Shanghai, Tientsin, Nanking and Hankow organised strikes and howled down the Communists. The Vice-Minister for Education got cold feet and exclaimed: "When the students go on to the streets the masses will inevitably follow them." The discontent culminated in the rising of the students of Peita, a glorious echo of the Hungarian epic in the heart of Communist China. It began with a mass meeting organised—miraculously!—not by the Communist Party but by the students themselves. Nineteen of their leaders got up and demanded autonomy for the universities and the sending home of all the Russian experts and advisers. Demonstrations took place which finally culminated in the mass demonstration of June 24 when Communist Party buildings were wrecked and a bomb was thrown into the Communist Party Secretariat at the Faculty of Medicine. The police opened fire on the demonstrators and many were shot down. Many others were arrested and sentenced to terms of imprisonment varying from five to fifteen years. Three ringleaders were executed. And as in the days of the Budapest rising, the people of the free world remained passive and watched the tragedy being played out, although through the hearts of six hundred million human beings they were intimately concerned.

Ma's eyes flashed as he told me the story, and for a long time I wondered whether it was in sorrow or hatred; and if in hatred then whether it was chiefly for the oppressors or for those who remained indifferent.

It appeared that clandestine posters on the factory walls became so frequent that an internal circular of the Communist Party issued in the summer of 1957 ordered a change of tactics towards them. "Our security agents have been in the habit of effacing such posters as soon as they set eyes on them, and then trying discreetly to find out who was responsible. In future they should gather the masses in the neighbourhood and lead them to the poster, and explain the real situation to them. Anti-Communist slogans circulate so rapidly that they are in the minds of the masses before they are discovered by the police. What therefore is the use of merely effacing them from the walls when they are already firmly fixed in people's brains?"

The Communist press itself reveals the existence of violent opposition in the working class; for example, the revolt of the apprentices in an agricultural machinery factory in Peking, and the revolts in the oil-fields in Yumen and Kansu.

"Very often," said Ma, "the partisans work together with groups of workers, assisting them to organise sabotage, to beat up particularly hated kanpous, and to conceal the leaders of ca'-canny strikes. Lu Han, a member of the National Assembly, declared: 'Active saboteurs present us with a difficult problem. . . . Counter-revolutionaries put up posters, commit arson, and even commit murder. From 1944 to 1945 they were no less than 170 attempts to assassinate our officials.'²

"The Communist dictatorship is answered by an underground ferment, which is, of course, secret, and reminiscent of the state of China before the revolt led by Sun Yat-sen. In fact, the secret societies and the clandestine parties are discussing in all seriousness and in anguish of mind the great problems of our destiny as a people."

"It is always under the iron heel that one dreams most of the sky."

"Unfortunately that is true, but nevertheless it is a proof of vitality that under the iron heel of Communist absolutism a re-examination of conscience is taking place and the problems of the future are being discussed."

My readers will understand why, of all the clandestine organisations Ma mentioned to me, I refer only to those which have already been unearthed by the Communists and denounced in their newspapers. First of all there is the National Chinese Party (Kuokuntang), whose

² With regard to acts of sabotage and the killing of kanpous, see the *People's Daily* of June 30, July 29, and October 11, 1957; the *T'chong Kowu Tsing Nien Pao* of July 12, 1957; the *Shensi Daily* of February 23, 1957; the *Kuang Ming Daily* of May 29, 1957; the *New-China Agency* of August 3 and September 3, 1957; and the *Yunnan Daily* of September 12, 1957.

immediate programme is the overthrow of the present usurpers in order to establish a government of the whole Chinese people. The existence of this party was revealed by the *Kwang Ming Daily* on October 6, 1957, which published the following odd detail concerning it: "In order to camouflage its activities this counter-revolutionary group causes its members to take part in the traffic in medicinal herbs between Chinghai and Honan." There is also an anti-Kolkhoze movement in the province of Chinghai, whose followers are reported to have killed twenty-two Communists. According to the Communist press there is also a group calling itself "The Servants of China" which "recruits itself in particular among students who are discontented because they have been prevented from continuing their education". Thirty-two of its members are reported to have been arrested. There is also a Democratic Socialist Party which holds secret meetings in the woods, and whose members "seek to establish contact with people with a shady past and a backward ideology who are discontented with present reality, thus making them likely members of the organisation."³

Ma also spoke of secret societies which are like those annelida which you can cut in half, and which then, instead of dying, grow a new head or a tail, as the case may be, and represent two annelida instead of one. This was the sort of thing that happened in 1949 when Mao crushed all the secret societies he could discover: ten years later there were more of them than ever before. Ma mentioned one such society known as the "Great Community", fifteen of whose members were arrested in Szechwan. Armed with spades and rifles, the followers of this organisation told the peasants that there would be a rising at this or that new moon, and that a new leader would arise. Seven members of an association known as "The Three Buddhas" were executed. Two other secret societies give themselves out to be associations for the study of Chinese calligraphy, though in reality they conspire against the Communist régime and proclaim its imminent overthrow. Fifteen of their high priests were arrested.⁴

The Chief Public Prosecutor Chang Ting-cheng revealed to the National Assembly that in the year 1956-7 alone 190,000 anti-Communists belonging to organised resistance networks were arrested as the result of a policy which he referred to as *yu fan pi*, or "reply to

³ Cf. the *Ching Hai Jih Pao* of August 30, 1957; the *Shansi Jih Pao* of August 16, 1957; and the *Shanghai Wen Hui Pao* of October 10, 1957.

⁴ Cf. the *New Hsin-Hua Agency* of August 2, 1957; the *Fukien Daily* of August 19, 1957; and the *Chang Chiang Daily* of September 29, 1957.

the opposition by liquidation", I wonder what our French Communists would say if they were treated to a dose of *yu fan pi*?

The resistance has obviously become a very serious matter, for the Ministry for Public Security has organised a public exhibition of Counter-Revolutionary Activities in Hankow. The exhibition displays no less than 172,769 anti-Communist documents seized by the authorities, 10,837 light arms, 525,402 rounds of ammunition, with fifty-seven wireless transmitters, hand-grenades, rifles, revolvers, small parachutes used for dropping food and anti-Communist propaganda in the country districts, and larger parachutes used for dropping secret agents.⁵

I brought back one of those smaller parachutes when I returned to France. It is about the size of a cape. And I also took a whole selection of propaganda material: leaflets, pamphlets, Chinese banknotes overprinted with anti-Communist slogans, newspapers which appeared to be copies of the *People's Daily* of Peking, but which, in fact, contained subversive material, and which could therefore be read by those who found them without attracting the attention of the police. I also have two of those famous safe-conducts which the Government of Nationalist China drops over Communist territory. Packages of rice, tea and chocolate, always more than welcome in straitened Communist China, are accompanied by a card with the words: "A present from your brothers in Formosa, who have not forgotten you."

THE PARTISANS

However, the main "droppings" over Communist territory from Formosa are for the benefit of the partisan resistance movement. On this subject Ma was in his element, and he spoke with pride and emotion, as though he felt that because of the tyranny under which they were groaning the Chinese people bore a special responsibility which they could live up to only by their sacrifices. It was exactly the same spirit which sustained the French resistance under the Nazi occupation of their country.

Among those societies denounced by the Communist press—obviously I am not in a position to mention the others—were "the Battalion of the 18th Anti-Communist Army" operating in Kwangsi; the "Corps of Active Anti-Communists" led by Liu Kuo-yung which operates in Yunnan; "The Revolutionary Army of the Chinese People" which operates in the mountains of Fukien and which has so far lost

⁵ Cf. the *Yangtze Daily*, May 30, 1958.

nine of its leaders by execution; "The Army of Young China" which has its operational bases in Hsiao Shan and Yung Keng; "The Army for Justice and Humanity" which operates in Shensi; and "The General Staff of Central China" which seeks to control the banks of the Yangtsekiang, and so on.

"We are organised on the model of the French resistance during the German occupation," said Ma. "Several groups of partisans will be joined together federally under the leadership of a man with, if possible, some official standing permitting him to move around freely and openly. Each network has its liaison officer, and a substitute ready to take his place at a moment's notice in the event of capture or death. This liaison officer has all the means of communication and contact in his hands, including the wireless transmitter—if the network possesses such a thing—the passwords, and so on."

"Do you get much assistance from Formosa?"

"Yes, they help us a good deal, and very often officers of the utmost courage and ability are parachuted to us from Taipeh. Eighty-five per cent. of our radio transmitters and our weapons, and thirty per cent. of our food, come from Formosa. The rest we get by raids on depôts and attacks on armed Communists. From time to time, too, we organise raids on villages where the local kanpous have behaved with exceptional brutality towards the peasants."

"And what is the attitude of the population towards you?"

"Very much the same as the attitude of the population must have been towards the resistance in France during the Nazi occupation. Without the sympathy and assistance of the local population we could not exist at all."

THE NATIONAL MINORITIES

The whole world has been stirred by the heroic revolt of the Tibetan people against its oppressors. In that case it was above all the romantic odyssey of a young living god, fleeing on mule-back along strange Himalayan paths peopled with spirits, preferring exile to the gilded submission which would otherwise have been his lot, which moved men's hearts and opened their eyes. But how hard those hearts and how blind those eyes where the ordinary people of China are concerned! Their resistance has rumbled throughout China for years without finding a sympathetic echo outside.

"It is something like a forest fire," said Ma. "When the main source of the fire seems to have been extinguished you find small fires

springing up spontaneously elsewhere. Of course, it is in the areas where there are national minorities that such fires find their best fuel. There are sixty such minorities totalling 36,000,000 people: 3,000,000 Tibetans; 3,500,000 Ouighours, those Moslem nomads of the white race who live in Sinkiang and whose women are renowned for their beauty; 5,500,000 Hui, who are also Moslems, but of the yellow race, and who live in Kansu and Yunnan; 6,000,000 Thais, the darkest of the Thailand races; 3,300,000 Yis; 2,000,000 Miaos, the primitive aborigines of the south; 1,000,000 Koreans; 1,000,000 Jews, Annamites, and so on. All these groups are like active volcanoes.

"In Sinkiang there are 30,000 active guerrillas operating around their Hotien base. There is even a clandestine Government of the Republic of Ouighoure. The Peking authorities have already executed dozens of Moslem chiefs and closed 800 mosques where partisans have found shelter. On August 20, 1957, there was a rising in Chinghai, which is inhabited by Buddhistic Tibetans and Mongols. The native governor, General Ma Pu-fang, was indicted by Peking on a charge 'of having encouraged regionalism and incited the population to rebellion'. 'Regionalism' is the official term used by Peking, sometimes on its own, and sometimes supported by adjectives such as 'feudal', 'subjectivist', 'religious', 'primitive' and so on, to describe that major heresy which consists in demanding that the rights of national minorities should be respected.

"There were three regional revolts in Kansu alone, which took place on May 8, 1950, April 2, 1952, and April 4, 1958. Unfortunately they were all bloodily suppressed. The president of the local autonomous government, Ma Chen-wu, a man greatly respected by his fellow citizens, was executed by the Communists as 'a ringleader and feudal criminal'. But this has not crushed the people of Kansu, and the underground resistance continues under the banner of the San Kwang. San means three and Kwang means to make an end of something: well, the people of Kansu want to make an end of Communist oppression, forced agricultural collectivisation and constant hardship. A democratic Islamic party is being organised under the slogans 'Avenge our leader Ma Pu-fang!' and 'Glory to Islam!'

"And then, of course, Tibet is an active volcano. You will remember that in 1951, when the country was still to some extent independent, as it had been for thousands of years, and continued to lead its own peaceable, magic life, sealed-off in the mountains, the troops of Peking invaded the country in defiance of undertakings

given to the Indian leader Nehru. After some terribly unequal battles, the Dalai Lama was compelled to give way and accept an agreement formally recognising the presence of Chinese troops on Tibetan soil, and undertaking in return to leave Tibet her internal autonomy. Within a year the Chinese were ignoring this agreement whenever it suited them, and in consequence resistance began to be organised. A movement named Mimang (against tyranny) was formed in Ta Chi-ling, and in 1952 it openly demanded the withdrawal of all Chinese Communist troops from Lhasa. This was followed by the first revolt which broke out in the autumn of 1953. Peking then compelled the Dalai Lama to declare the Mimang movement illegal, and the Chinese arrested and executed many of its leaders. I escaped with my life, but I got this little souvenir."

With a grim smile Ma proudly indicated a scar which ran from where his thick mop of brown hair was disfigured by a bare patch, across his forehead, to end over one eyebrow, which had lost part of its hairs.

"But the resistance, organised by Aly Chuan Jeh, continued. The number of guerrillas organised in the Thensoong Mag, which means Defence of the Faith, is estimated at 35,000. There are two military groups, including the redoubtable Khambas. Peking has not so far succeeded in crushing this movement by force, so it has tried to starve out its supporters by seizing their lands. The partisan Khambas abandon their hearths to live in caves in the mountains or to hide themselves in the jungle, or to find shelter in the great monasteries. From their bases they organise sabotage, harassing raids on the Chinese Communist troops, and commando raids to assist their persecuted brethren. Often, when death sentences have been announced, they have raided the prison in question before the executions to rescue the condemned men. When they learn of a convoy being sent off to forced labour they swoop down to kill the guards and release the prisoners. If there is a shortage of food in any particular area they raid the Chinese food depôts and take sustenance for the local population, which admires them enormously and helps them enthusiastically; whereas it loathes and boycotts the Communists. This support on the part of the population is the real reason why a comparative handful of men armed with obsolescent weapons can defy the well-equipped legions of a totalitarian State.

"The resistance never lets up, but occasionally there are really spectacular feats of arms; for example, in October 1957 the Khambas

penetrated into Tsetang, which is only about sixty miles from Lhasa, and withdrew only after inflicting severe losses on the Communists. A report of the Associated Press, of December 17, I think, announced the arrival of a thousand Communist wounded at Peking airfield as a result of this action. The trunk road from Chiang Hai to Tibet has been made practically impassable, except in strength, by the constant raids of the guerrillas."

"What you say is very interesting," I admitted, "but visitors to China are always taken to the much-publicised National Minorities Exhibition in Peking where everything is shown to demonstrate the infinite solicitude of the Chinese Communist Government for its national minorities. For example, there are staffs of translators working there in special libraries turning various Marxist works into their respective languages at the expense of the government. There are folklore sections, and models of great schemes planned for the benefit of the national minorities. And there are also men and women who claim to be authentic representatives of their peoples."

"But if that were a reflection of the true facts, why the revolts? No, the truth is that those so-called representatives are, in fact, shameful collaborators—you knew the type yourself in France, Madame—who have sold themselves to Peking and now assist it to despoil, enslave, break up and finally absorb their own peoples. But why are those visitors content with inspecting that National Minorities Exhibition? Why don't they compare the carefully prepared exhibits there with the actual life of our minority populations?"

"At least we have been assured in the West that the Communists have had a certain amount of success with the Buddhists and the Moslems."

"That's true—at least, it was at first, when they succeeded in deceiving them; just as at first they succeeded in deceiving the merchants and industrialists. They made them generous promises and they managed to buy over certain of their leaders. But since 1952 the situation has steadily changed; many Buddhist priests and Moslem religious leaders who had previously been duped have since come to the conclusion that their new masters demand absolute submission even down to the smallest details of ritual. Those who are too compromised to turn back, and are too much in the toils of the National Minorities Institute, continue their outrageous behaviour; for example, claiming that Mao is a new Boddhisatva, and that Karl Marx was inspired by the Koran. And at the same time these yes-men denounce the old sages, hermits,

prophets and local heroes, who by their very existence according to the ancient law represent an obstacle to collaboration. An added source of discontent is the pillaging of temples by the kanpous; and then the 'reform of thought', although it is the same there as elsewhere, is regarded by the national minorities as a Chinese aggression against their national beliefs. Finally there are the raids carried out to obtain slave labour, the economic destruction of the artisanate, and the ruthless collectivisation of agriculture, all of which touch these peoples to the quick.

"In other words, the 'policy of the open hand' has failed, and the national minorities have withdrawn into sullen hostility, which has become more and more savage until it has burst out here and there in the armed risings I mentioned. In fact, among the national minorities Communism has to resort more and more to brute force, just as it does everywhere else. That is its unavoidable fate. It kills us now, but one day it will die itself. Incidentally, my comrades of the partisan resistance—of the maquis, as you would say—are not only Chinese, but men of all these national minorities. We are fraternally united and we live together only for the day . . ."

THE REVOLT IN TIBET

Those were the last words of my Chinese Ulysses, the herculean Ma, with his proud scar and his bulging muscles. I thought of him at once when the wireless brought the news of the volcano which had erupted in Tibet, and it was under the influence of his vigorous and courageous spirit that I strove to relive those events.

The peak point of the revolt was in March 1958, when, as in Hungary, students, peasants, women and children, and monks—in short, the whole population—joined in the revolt. But, like Moscow, Peking was able to use tanks, planes and artillery against obsolescent rifles, bare hands and courageous hearts. By March 19 Lhasa was a town of ruins. Systematic bombardment had destroyed the Potola, the Winter Palace of the Dalai Lama, the cathedral of Jo Khang, the Chokpore Institute of Medicine, where the secrets of China's traditional therapy were guarded, and numerous monasteries, such as the famous Ramoye. The 13,000 lamas who were in residence joined the rebels. Ten thousand Tibetans were killed, of whom 800 were monks. The Khambas then withdrew towards the Brahmaputras and the Himalayas.

As was to be expected from a Communist régime, the subsequent

repression was utterly ruthless. The punitive forces engaged were equipped with weapons such as the Tibetan mountains had never seen before, including flame-throwers; and the two great roads built by Tibetan forced labour facilitated the task of the Chinese oppressors.

The long night, broken only by sobs, now descended on Tibet. As in the times of the worst Stalinist terror, when an area in revolt was encircled and a complete black-out was established to allow the bloody work of repression to proceed unhindered, so the same was done now in Tibet under Mao. No one apart from the punitive forces was allowed to enter or leave the area. Within the circle of death the suspects were slaughtered. A certain percentage of the entire population was taken, put up against the wall and executed as a deterrent example to all the rest. Whole villages were rased to the ground and their surviving inhabitants deported.

Echoes of the terrible tragedy can gradually be heard now on the lips of escaped refugees in India and Nepal. One of them declares that thousands of innocent inhabitants were flogged in the market places during the course of the Chinese Communist interrogations. The most revolting tortures were inflicted in order to discover the names of the rebels. Neither women nor children were spared. Those sentenced to death were immediately executed and their bodies were left lying in the streets. Indian newspaper correspondents reported that the waters of the river near Lhasa were no longer usable on account of the number of decomposing corpses floating in it, and that the surviving inhabitants were compelled to dig wells in order to obtain fresh water.

The horrors of Oradour and Lidice repeat themselves throughout human history; only the uniform changes. From the leather jacket of the GPU, to the neat black jacket of the SS man; and today he wears the uniform of the Chinese Communist security forces. But everywhere he remains the same cold and brutal killer. His victim has blue eyes here, brown eyes there, and dark almond eyes in Lhasa. But everywhere it is the same martyr. Auschwitz, Oradour, Lidice, Budapest and Lhasa, a litany of totalitarian shame, the despair of all free men.

★

But there are three circumstances which make Chinese repression in Tibet even more atrocious than anything that went before. First of all, it is taking on the character of genocide and threatens to wipe a whole people off the face of the earth—and let us make no mistake about it, the Communists would be quite prepared to kill every living

soul if it were necessary to establish their hegemony. The second circumstance is that the Nazi brutes, having done their foul work, did not, at least, slander their victims; whereas the Communist brutes slander theirs, pursuing them even beyond the grave. The Dalai Lama, they tell the world, had to be forced to escape from their clutches; the lama monasteries were hotbeds of debauchery and nameless excesses—odious echoes of the slanders heaped on the Hungarian patriots. And the third and final distressing circumstance: today there are intellectuals in the free West who refuse their compassion to the victims and keep their approval and “understanding” for the murderers.

Why? First of all, Tibet is a long way away—not that distance prevented them from bewailing the victims of Hiroshima to the top of their bent. Secondly, the murderers are supposed to be delivering Tibet from the chains of theocratic reaction. But this did not prevent those same people from crying shame on the British when their security forces suppressed the Mau-Mau, whose witch-doctors were hardly more modern and progressive than the Tibetan lamas. And why do they clamour for the independence of the Arabs, whose ancient prejudices and religious fanaticism are no less backward; to which is added their treatment of women, which is infinitely more backward than the civilisation of the lamas?

Unfortunately there are even liberal-minded anti-Communists who allow their indignation against Communist oppression in Tibet to cool at the thought that the Tibetans hold strange and superstitious beliefs. But are their beliefs really as strange and superstitious as all that? Compared, for example, with the religions of the West? Certainly the idea that this young man with the high cheek-bones is the living reincarnation of Buddha tends to make us smile. But do you think that the fanaticism of the pious Jew who would rather die than cook his meat in the vessel reserved for milk might not make him smile too? And why is the idea that Buddha is reincarnated in the body of the Dalai Lama so fantastic and ridiculous when the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ is regarded as present in the Eucharist?

Certain Indian leaders have thought fit to confirm the chief excuse and justification for all the horrors of Communism: it opens the way to modern technique, and all peoples must accept that. But why then were these same people so bitter in their hostility to the British in India? Indisputably the British brought modern technique to the banks of the Ganges—and with infinitely less cruelty.

But in reality all this is nothing but a pitiful excuse to avoid having

to condemn yet another Communist crime. In fact there is no end to the gullibility of these "advanced" spirits who present Communism to us as though it were the messianic vessel of human progress. How is it possible not to see plainly that Communist dogma and practice are far more backward and obscurantist than those of the Tibetan lamas? And that they are accompanied by rites which are so much more blood-thirsty? The one—the Buddhist lama—teaches that "pain must be driven from all living things". The other—the Communist lama—aspire to dominate the world and bend all living things to his will. The one belief supports thousands of work-shy monks who live on the willing charity of the people. The other has millions of activists who also live on the people, but by means of a vast system of planned extortion. Which, in the last resort, is the more barbarous? The Buddhist who reincarnates the dead in new and more dignified lives, or the Communist who disembodies the living in the basest humiliations? And which is the more backward? The power which commits the atrocities which have just been recorded or the insurgents of Lhasa who condemn it in their manifesto?

"The Chinese Communists have seized our grain, our cattle and our gold reserves; they have confiscated our best pasture land.

They force us to work twelve hours a day building roads under extremely difficult conditions and without pay.

In violation of their own Constitution, which provides that all nationalities shall have the right to preserve their ancient customs, they force our monks to marry, they force them to work on the roads, and they deport them.

They do not allow Tibetans to go to hospitals.

The local committees of the Communist Party, whose secretary is invariably a Han, have been substituted for our own local authorities, and we are forced to obey the puppets of Peking.

The Communist system is a famine system.

The barracks, the roads, the airfields and the arsenals which the Communists force us to build are not built for our benefit; they serve only the imperialist interests of Communist China."

Does that tone sound so very backward? Or steeped in ancient superstition? Rather, who could fail to sense, in these lines, that wonderful, age-old breath of liberty, the sole guarantee of progress, which throughout history, and among all races, has made the oppressed rise against their oppressors?

I was happy to see that my socialist Hindu friends, Narayan, Golay and Mheta, had not fallen victim to these woeful sophisms. "As conservative as the social system of Tibet certainly is," they declared, "totalitarian Communism represents something still more backward, because it kills not only man but man's mind. . . . What we are witnessing today in Tibet is the deliberate extermination of a people and its way of life, an appalling repetition of what happened in Hungary. It is the final proof—if any were still needed—that in Communism we are facing a new and sinister form of imperialism."

In fact, Communism is a new form of imperialism far more sinister than the vanishing one which came from the West; far more cynical in its seizure of place and wealth; far more ruthless in its suppression of local customs and friendships; far more oppressive; and far more murderous.

If one really wishes to wean people away from archaic beliefs, then the most elementary maxim of human civilisation requires that it should be done by persuasion, by understanding and by example, and certainly not by forced labour and the stake, since the chains of the one and the flames of the other will make them cling even more desperately to their ancient idols, which will thereby have become the reasons for sacrificing their very lives. When Communism employs forced labour and the stake then it is plain proof that the aim is not the intellectual emancipation of the people in question but their social enslavement.



I have now come to the end of my investigations. The rumble of Communist tanks in far-off Tibet is an added reason for me to recall the ravaged faces of those Chinese refugees I left behind in Hongkong. They had all assured me solemnly that the Chinese people would rise against their oppressors, and I had thought to myself: Of course, refugees always live on hope! But I had misjudged their spirit and the objectivity of their evidence. And since at the end of the task and after all my experiences I must now distil their common principle, where should I find it more certainly and more clearly than in their own convincing words? Let me make my final synthesis of the answers they all gave to one of my questions, a question asked at first with some inner scepticism.

"But wasn't it worse under capitalism? And isn't it worse today in this refugee camp?"

Once they had grasped the portent of those questions, they one and all looked at me with astonishment, and sometimes even alarm. For them, the authentic representatives of a people which is said to have profited by the Communist revolution, it was a patent and indisputable truth that their conditions of life had greatly worsened under Communism compared with what had gone before. And as for the situation in the refugee camps of Hongkong, they all assured me that it was a paradise compared with what they had left behind in China.

Hongkong a paradise! I looked at the wretched huts in which they lived, and at the poor cotton clothes they wore, and my heart ached for them. More even than from the detailed replies to my questions, the real atmosphere of China under Communism was provided by the same few words which came again and again like a litany in the memories of all of them, simple words which evoked the same nightmare: terror, rationing, compulsory political lectures, public confessions, shortage, twenty-four catties of rice, requisitions, queues, arrests, no medicaments, forced labour, brain-washing, moral bombardments, punishment, hunger, fear . . .

Terrible words, summed up for me in the gallows humour of a couple of refugees:

"I used to wonder," said one, "why they made us all so thin. If we had been fat their police could have seen us better."

"True," said the other, "but then they couldn't get so many of us into one prison cell."

All thin, all candidates for prison cells: those two succinct propositions sum up the whole picture, the whole essence of Communist "People's China" as it affects the lives of the Chinese people.

REFUGEES v. VISITORS

IT WAS very hot and I was tired from all the long conversations, broken repeatedly while my interpreters did their patient, plodding work. So tired that I went to spend an hour or two in the air-conditioned vestibule of the "Peninsula", to chat with other French writers and journalists who were at the time also haunting the threshold of Mao Tse-tung's empire. There was one who had actually just come from China where he had been on a tour of inspection as a guest of the Communist Government. He was very conscious of the advantage this gave him, and he talked confidently in the assured tones of "an eye-witness", of a man who had been on the spot and seen for himself.

"BUT I SAW IT, I TELL YOU . . ."

"I saw Chou En-lai," he was telling everyone who cared to listen. "And even Mao Tse-tung himself for perhaps a quarter of an hour. They are charming, highly cultured men, intelligent, and very anxious for peace."

"That's exactly what they used to say of von Ribbentrop a little while ago," I put in. "And as for Franco; we all know he's a real Catholic gentleman, full of Christian charity; a great *connoisseur* of literary style, who wants peace more than anything."

The face of the eye-witness was a study for a moment or two.

"You know perfectly well," I went on, "that even at home you can't tell the way a man treats his employees by the way he receives guests in his drawing-room. So how can you claim to judge a foreign political régime by the civilities of its ministers to their guests? Particularly when it's a dictatorial régime. At the utmost you can assume some vague sort of relationship between the private behaviour of statesmen and their political conduct when they are to some extent in control of the latter; that is to say, in democratic countries. But under a totalitarian régime—whose policy is decided without appeal and carried into action without opposition, irrespective of the temperament of any

of its ministers—how on earth could the exquisite taste of this one for Wagner or of that one for lotus leaves have anything whatever to do with it?"

"But who told you that the Chinese régime is totalitarian?" our eye-witness objected. "Aren't you assuming in advance precisely what you're trying to prove?"

"Am I? Tell me, did you see any opposition newspapers on sale in Peking when you were there?"

"No. . . ."

"In that case *you* have provided the proof."

"At least my presence there was to some purpose. . . ."

"In the sense perhaps that what you were *not* allowed to see demonstrated the uselessness of looking at what you *were* allowed to see. The moment a régime suppresses all opposition then everything it displays becomes suspect. And, incidentally, if you have to prove that freedom of opposition is stifled in Peking, it isn't necessary to go there to ascertain that there are no oppositional newspapers on sale; the fact is obvious enough no matter what part of the world you are in. And if you know in advance that China is living under a dictatorship, how can you hope to discover its real features through the spectacles the dictatorship provides you with?"

"But what makes you think that visitors like myself can see the country only through those spectacles?"

"I grant that you can look with your own eyes. But it's the country itself the dictators have faked."

"I've heard that story before: 'Potemkin' villages, guided tours, terrorised witnesses. Do you really think we are all foolish enough to be taken in by such tricks?"

"Do *you* really think that Communist States are foolish enough to use tricks that can easily be seen through?"

"Once again you're assuming something which first has to be proved: is it true that Communist States use tricks?"

"Well, well! Look, we're both in agreement that Communist China is a totalitarian state, and that it exercises a strict censorship. In that case how can you suppose that the reality which it conceals so fiercely from its own people will be revealed freely to a stranger? Do you really suppose that such a régime will move heaven and earth to keep its own people in ignorance but cheerfully keep the foreign visitor informed? One of the most obvious and invariable characteristics of dictatorship—not only today but at all times—is that it

battens down a leaden cover on the whole of society, a cover so thick that not even its own officials can penetrate it. Cicero defined despotisms, as they used to be called, as 'régimes in which the facts have to be whispered in corners'. And in his memoirs Trotsky, who ought to know what he's talking about, stresses this point in particular: *'We live in the blackest night; everything is a painted façade; all truths are official. You feel yourself going mad because you are reduced to a shadow groping your way forward in a world of shadows.'* Yet you, the passing visitor, imagine that you can see more clearly in a world like that than even the officials of the dictatorship on the spot. May I remind you of the German leaders under Nazism, and of us all in France under Pétain? We all had to listen to the B.B.C. to find out what was going on in Germany and in France. Similarly, today, if you want to find out what's going on in Communist China, you must listen to the radio and to the refugees here in Hongkong. Even in a free country, the things a visitor can see and experience in the space of a few weeks represent no more than a thin layer on the surface of that fathomless ocean which is human society. But at least, the things he experiences and the facts he hears are authentic; whereas under a dictatorship everything he is shown is a delusion and a sham."

"Aren't you really being a bit too sweeping, Madame? Admittedly there is more camouflage in a dictatorship than in a democracy, but don't you think that it is nevertheless possible to get some inkling of the truth through the veil of propaganda?"

"On that point we happen to have very cogent evidence available, cogent enough to disillusion you for ever as to the value of 'evidence' brought home by people who have been on guided tours in totalitarian countries. Throughout the Stalinist régime in Russia we had to endure an endless stream of apologetics and praise of the Soviet Union from visitors who had been invited to come there and 'see for themselves'. And yet . . . thanks to Khrushchev's famous report to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party we know now from a truly indisputable source that the Stalinist régime was one of the nightmare tyrannies of history. Yet all those gullible visitors, all firmly convinced by what they had 'seen with their own eyes', treated the warnings of people who had every reason to know better as the babblings of prejudiced cranks. And they all declared that the stories about forced-labour camps (which they had naturally not been taken to see) were pure calumnies invented by the enemies of the Soviet Union. But Khrushchev, who knew better, subsequently admitted that under the

rod of Stalin, the Father of the People, the Soviet Union was covered with such camps as a sick body is covered with sores, and that millions of innocent people perished in them. And may I remind you that even a man of the calibre of President Herriot described his visit to the Ukraine in the spring of 1934 in idyllic tones, whereas it is now frankly admitted that the spring of 1934 was one of the most terrible periods in a politically caused famine which caused the deaths of millions. And may I recall that President Benes returned from the Soviet Union in 1937 with 'proof' that Marshal Tukhachevsky was a 'traitor', a supposed fact confirmed seven years later by the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, Davies, with all the authority of the 'man on the spot'—although even then the whole thing stank to high heaven as a political machination; a fact that Khrushchev himself has since confirmed.

"And I should stress that when Khrushchev's famous report exposed all those titivated accounts with which we had been regaled under Stalin as false, irresponsible, deceitful or blind, not one of those precious 'friends of the Soviet Union' had the good grace to admit that his presence 'on the spot' had merely assisted the liars to lie more convincingly. Not one of those 'friends of the Soviet Union' subsequently apologised for having vilified those who had denounced Stalin as a tyrant, those who had recognised the foul smell of murder, without the necessity of being 'on the spot'. No. That literature in praise of the dictators, which is one of the most shameful features of our epoch, hardly paused in its stride when it was blown to smithereens by Khrushchev himself—it merely changed its direction towards Communist China and other Communist countries.

"For example, M. Léo Hamon came back from Hungary (just before the rising) and told us that he had seen that under Communism in Hungary the youth was 'more cherished than anywhere else in the world'. About two weeks later that same youth went on to the streets to shed its blood in streams in a desperate attempt to overthrow the Hungarian Communist régime. And M. Jean-Paul Sartre assured us that it was impossible to doubt that the great majority of the Chinese people were in favour of the present régime—just at the moment when ninety-five per cent. of the Chinese soldiers taken prisoner of war in Korea refused to let themselves be repatriated. And today Maurice Roy, Daniel Mayer, Edgar Faure, Jean-Maurice Hermann and Simone de Beauvoir—to quote only the leading names amongst the French apologists—regale us with the same praise for Mao as their predecessors always had on tap for Stalin before his own lieutenants

publicly admitted that he was 'a bloody-minded madman'. And the general public is once again swallowing the same yarns with regard to Mao. It's enough to make one despair of humankind. As for you, sir, I have only just met you, but I beg of you for the honour of our common profession of letters not to add your voice to that suspect howl."

"You may quote precedents and instance examples, but I am still not prepared to admit that even the cunningest of despots is a sorcerer. He can't turn those washed-out boiler-suits you see on everybody in the streets into silk robes, for example; or conjure up an ultra-modern dam where it doesn't exist. And I still say that if you are on the spot, you become conscious of a general atmosphere despite all attempts at deceit."

"To some extent I agree. If you are on the spot you can, for example, make a note of the prices in the windows. They probably won't be false. And by collecting and checking them you can obtain certain data for a study of prevailing living standards. You will see, on the one hand, women digging up the roads and, on the other, modern factories. The opportunity for seeing that sort of material fact which is difficult to fake does admittedly lend a certain value to being on the spot, but how much does it really amount to? Not more than the substance of a ten-page report. All the rest, under a dictatorship, is faked; and unfortunately it is the rest which fills the hundreds of pages in the reports which follow all these sponsored and carefully guided visits."

"I notice that you confine yourself to generalities and to logical inferences, Madame. I would sooner you produced a few hard facts, particularly as you say you prefer them to theories. Tell me then how one could possibly stage such a vast illusion capable of turning a nightmare world into glowing colours even for those actually travelling through it? How can you change base metal into what looks like pure gold?"

"Allow me to refer you on that particular point to the work of the well-known American sinologist Richard L. Walker. He has taken the trouble to reconstitute, both socially and geographically, the itineraries of 200 of the principal 'eye-witnesses' invited to China from all parts of the world by Mao who subsequently regaled us with such rosy reports. His work very clearly reveals the existence of that 'invisible track' along which the visitors were shunted. It was there, but only a few particularly shrewd visitors suspected it. Among them happened to be

two Frenchmen—who will of course never be invited again—Robert Guillain and Lucien Bodard. Another was the Swiss reporter Peter Schmid, who wrote:

“The performance unrolls with clockwork efficiency just so long as the visitor keeps on the magnetic track of the robot-pilot; but everything goes wrong as soon as he takes a single step to the right or left of the prearranged path. Yet if he doesn’t he hasn’t the slightest chance of seeing behind the scenes; of seeing, for example, how the all-powerful bureaucratic machine manhandles the unfortunate Chinese who are in its grip.”¹

“And Richard L. Walker gives a detailed description of the innumerable means employed by Communist governments to fake the truth. After all, faking is not too difficult an art when you have to deal only with visitors who are pressed for time, who are limited in competence, and are restrained by their obligations of courtesy as guests; and particularly when you have at your disposal all the enormous resources of a dictatorship to manipulate men and things. There are figures available concerning what has become a veritable national industry in Communist China: the bringing of so-called delegations into the country from all parts of the world, and so shepherding them when they arrive that they see only a falsified and distorted picture of the truth. Apart from many thousands of officials ensconced in the various departments of the administration, there are 4,000 directly employed by the Chinese Tourist Office and the Friends of China Association, which is the exact equivalent of the notorious Friends of the Soviet Union Association.”

“That was the organisation which arranged my visit.”

“You don’t surprise me. I’m sorry to reduce you to the status of a single grain, but the fact is that that particular mill grinds 8,000 grains like you every year, and they come from all corners of the earth. Yes, 8,000! And the sponsoring organisation spends about £30,000,000 annually on the job. The procedure has been developed to the nth degree and its principles are set down in textbooks. The itineraries are prepared in advance down to the smallest detail. Even the grains—if you will excuse the term—are sieved in advance into eight categories: according to their political standing, and the importance public opinion will attach to what they have to say when they return home. The first four categories, the most important, are received with flowers at the airfield—below that there are no orchids for anyone. And the

¹ Peter Schmid, *The Reporter*, July 12, 1956, p. 27.

special schools for guides and interpreters make a point of training pretty girls for the job. Once the trip starts everything has already been arranged: the people to be met, the model undertakings to be inspected, the areas to be visited, and, above all, the areas to be avoided; even the 'casual' remarks to be made by, say, a porter, or a taxi-driver on the way have been prepared. Just everything is calculated, measured, coloured and laid down with the greatest possible care; even to the extent of being adapted to the idiosyncrasy of each visitor."

"If what you say is true, Madame; if everything displayed is a mere façade, and if the dictatorship wears an impenetrable mask, then I can only wonder just what sources of information you have at your disposal to justify the very definite ideas I can see you have concerning the new China. What can be the basis of your reliable information about the country?"

"First of all, there is the evidence not of tourists but of people who have *lived and worked* in Communist China for years; people such as Lucien Taire, Pierre Fano, Father Trivièrre, and so on. Then there is official Chinese documentary material to be found in specialised publications: decrees, circulars, domestic statistics—not the sort of thing prepared for foreign consumption of course—self-criticism, and so on. Naturally, in order to make good use of these particular sources you must go in for a good deal of patient sifting, translation, comparison and analysis. That sort of work is admittedly far harder and much less immediately interesting than touring the country as a welcome visitor; and in this journalistic age of ours, which is so keen on the 'eye-witness account', we are inclined to forget that such painstaking work nevertheless lays the solid basis of our knowledge, and always has done. For example, those historians who were in a position to write authentically about happenings, say, in the reign of Louis XIV, all used it, and none of them was 'on the spot' at the *petits levers*."

"They could do it only on the basis of the evidence left by those who were 'on the spot'."

"Certainly, but it was the evidence of people who had spent their lives 'on the spot'; not the evidence of visitors who had stayed there for perhaps a week or so. For example, no serious historian would have dreamt of founding his picture of the court of Louis XIV on the evidence of those Turkish visitors who spent a week there as guests. At the utmost they would have used such evidence to show what the Turks thought of Louis XIV and his court. Allow me to tell you about a very interesting incident which has a direct bearing on the point.

"During his brief spell at the heights of Soviet power, Malenkov delivered a sensational speech about the fantastic progress being made by Soviet production. Immediately the usual collection of gulls began to shriek, swarms of invited guests set off to witness the marvels for themselves, and there was a great deal of talk about the coming era of free bread in the Soviet Union. But certain people who did not go anywhere near the spot, such as Lucien Laurat, Boris Souvarine, and the remarkable team of the *Est-Ouest* review, sat down in their offices and proceeded to examine and analyse the economic data conscientiously and competently; and as a result of their labours they came to the conclusion that Malenkov was bluffing, and they said so—only to be derided by those who had been 'on the spot' and seen for themselves. Four years passed. By that time Malenkov had become an 'anti-Party element', and the new master Khrushchev revealed in a speech that his predecessor had been lying, and gave the real production figures for the period about which Malenkov had been talking. And lo and behold! those figures tallied with those which had been worked out at the time in the *Est-Ouest* review! Exactly the same thing has happened a dozen and one times; though, of course, without in the least shaking the smug confidence of the cohorts of deceived-deceivers, who have all been 'on the spot'."

"According to you, therefore, Madame, anyone who goes there should reject everything he sees out of hand for fear of falling into a trap. For my part I still feel that there's more to be got out of the evidence of a visitor—even if he is a little naïve, provided that he is of good will—than there is from the attacks of someone who is out to demolish everything systematically, and who, though he may be deceived by nothing, blackens everything."

"That sounds all very fine and good, but what I reproach those 'naïve' tourists with—as you so charitably describe them—is not so much their excessive credulity but their extraordinary lack of curiosity. And if I do reproach them with being naïve, it is because they are naïve in one direction only; in other words, that they are not *honestly* naïve. You see, when they are at home they are very far from being naïve and trusting; and they would never dream of judging a régime by the rose-coloured clouds floating high up in the sunlight. At home they are quite shrewd enough to investigate below the surface and find out how ordinary people live. It's only when they stand on Communist soil that they suddenly become superficial and naïve. And then a ministerial statement is quite

sufficient to convince and satisfy them, and they make no attempt whatever to penetrate beneath the surface of the things they are shown. They no longer ask awkward questions, and they no longer make those shrewd inquiries they are accustomed to make at home—concerning wages, standards of living, food prices, labour norms, inequalities of income, working conditions in the factories, trade-union rights, the powers of censorship, election procedures, police methods, and so on. And, of course, they never breathe a word about the forced-labour camps, although under Hitler those same people regarded that as—to use their own words—‘the major phenomenon in relation to which the whole régime can be judged’. In other words, those keen analysts where bourgeois society is concerned have nothing to offer us but soothing syrup where Communist society is concerned.”

“But you said yourself that under the dictatorships it was technically impossible to be too curious, so how can you justly reproach those visitors for that?”

“I wouldn’t reproach them if they would only admit it, instead of pretending that they have come back with the real truth about China. Let them admit that the essential thing in Communist China is the existence of a dictatorship which conceals the truth.”

“Not to put too fine a point on it, you are suggesting that my journey here was useless?”

“If by ‘here’ you mean Hongkong, I don’t. Because here in Hongkong, readily available, you have the richest and most authentic source of information you could possibly obtain on reality in Communist China—if only you care to use it. There are a million and a half Chinese here who fled from their country after experiencing Communism at first hand for years. It flabbergasts me to see how all those visitors, who claim to be friends of the poor and at the same time sceptical enough not to be taken in easily by official soft soap, hurry off to Peking, their hearts in their mouths, to lap up what the Communist rulers there have to tell them; and yet when, on the way, they find subjects of those rulers who are at last in a position to open their mouths without fear of the consequences, they completely ignore their testimony. As far as I am concerned, I came to Hongkong precisely to hear what they had to say. Here you can meet the real ‘People’s China’, described by the people themselves now that they have at last wrenched the Communist gag from their mouths.”

On seeing this patent gap in his curiosity suddenly revealed my interlocutor turned red, because he was well aware that as a “materi-

alist" he ought to attach more importance to the wages of a workman than to the word of an official, and that as a "humanitarian" he ought to be more moved by the fate of the refugees than by the new bridge over the Hankow. But at the same time he was embarrassed, because he also realised that if he once opened that gate, so many truths would come flooding through that the neat and orderly little garden he had made for Mao in his conscience would be swept away. So instead, like all dialecticians caught out in a lack of humanity, my interlocutor merely bid still higher.

"But, after all, you really can't rely on the evidence of refugees. They are by definition hostile to the régime from the start, otherwise they would not have fled from it. They're soured and embittered, and all they're interested in is airing their resentments. What they have to say is hopelessly one-sided and prejudiced."

"Very well. Then you tell me: when and where was there ever another country which produced soured and embittered citizens by the million—and to such an extent that when its soldiers were taken prisoners of war *eighty-five per cent. of them persisted in refusing to allow themselves to be repatriated*—as was the case with the Chinese soldiers taken prisoner in Korea? And, remember, they were all supposed to be volunteers. Most people seem to have forgotten that already, though it ought to be prominent among the historical references of all men sincerely interested in the fate of the world. It is so important that it is worth recalling the details again:

"On January 23, 1954, 22,000 Chinese prisoners of war captured by the United Nations forces during the Korean war were released to the freedom they had chosen. That number represented *eighty-five per cent. of the total number of Chinese prisoners*. At first the number of those who did not wish to be sent back to Communist China amounted to no less than *ninety-five per cent. of the whole*. The United Nations had the moral courage to decide that no repatriation should be compulsory, but then unfortunately it had the weakness to allow the Communists to try to get hold of the prisoners again by so-called 'explanatory sessions'. Of course, if the masters of Peking had had the slightest dignity they would never have come begging those men to return once they had decided not to. But then, what was a little tarnished dignity compared with the risk that the real sentiments of the Chinese people towards them would be revealed?

"The emissaries of Peking and Pyong Yang were now allowed to subject the unfortunate prisoners to an intense course of 'persuasion'.

Perhaps you will recall those sordid gatherings at which the Communist manhunters strained every nerve to get the escapees back into their power again. But this time they did not have the police at their disposal to enforce obedience where persuasion failed. And how they begged and crawled! But it was not long before they were forced to realise that without their terror apparatus, and with only words, even lying words, to help them, they were impotent. Those prisoners of war knew the truth about Mao's China, and because they knew the truth they refused to return. Once bitten, twice shy! But the Communists had one trump card all the same: the families of the prisoners were still in their hands! They held hostages! And they had recourse without shame to that form of 'persuasion'. That threat succeeded in blackmailing some of the prisoners. Just . . . one in six! And it was with that one and only weapon that the Communists succeeded in reducing the percentage of refusals from ninety-five to eighty-five per cent.

"But as always when a Communist imposture is exposed, the free world managed to be unable or unwilling to appreciate the significance of the exposure. How many people still recall that fantastic failure today? And yet it was perhaps the most revealing disaster a Communist régime ever suffered in its role of 'People's Government'. The only happening comparable with it was the Hungarian revolt, which demonstrated to the whole world beyond a peradventure that Hungary was groaning under a monstrous tyranny."

"I'm not sure that I know what you're getting at."

"Very well, then—I'll tell you. Don't you realise the tremendous significance of the refusal by eighty-five per cent. of all prisoners to let themselves be repatriated? You ought to, because as French men and women we have an illuminating and ready-made comparison to hand. There were a million French prisoners of war in German hands at the end of the Second World War. Of that million just a few hundred did not, for some reason or other, want to return. But at the first opportunity all the rest just flooded home, swamping all the arrangements made to receive them. They were too eager to wait even a single day longer than necessary. Remember? That's the natural reaction of men who have been kept by force away from their country—when the country in question lives under normal conditions. Now imagine what the world would have said if 850,000 of those million French prisoners of war had refused to allow themselves to be sent home! In fact, if only one-tenth part of that number had refused to return, the whole world—and particularly the Communist countries—

would have declared—and would obviously have been right so to declare—that France was so grossly misgoverned that she had become a wicked stepmother to her children.

“Thus the repudiation of their country’s government by the vast majority of those Chinese prisoners of war is a phenomenon unique in human history. It proves indisputably that the people of China hate the Communist régime. It was a sample poll taken amongst 22,000 soldiers. Now any public opinion institute in the world will tell you that 22,000 soldiers taken at random, as those men were, must necessarily constitute a thoroughly representative cross-cut of the population as a whole. Their behaviour necessarily provides valid data on the attitude of the whole population. It was, in fact, though inadvertently, a real sample plebiscite; the only free election in muzzled China since Mao came to power. And the result of that plebiscite told the world that the people of China, like the people of Hungary and the people of Tibet—in fact like all the peoples of the world who are unfortunate enough to live under a Communist régime—detest Communism.”

However, this wasn’t enough for the gentleman who had seen for himself, “on the spot”, and he returned to the defence:

“Of course, a revolution naturally dissatisfies some people, even if only because it deprives them of their privileges and upsets their comfortable jogtrot. You really wouldn’t have been foolish enough to judge the feelings of the French people at the time of the French Revolution by the refugees in Coblenz, would you?”

“Indeed I would have judged that way; but not foolishly, since in so doing I should have been able to discover with certainty on which side the French people were in the affair. Nothing shows more clearly the nature of a revolution than the social layering of its emigrés. In short: tell me what you are fleeing from and I will tell you who you are. At Coblenz you found princes and dukes with their following of marquises in powdered wigs, waited on by lackeys, and still driving in their carriages—and their soft white hands would have told you that they had never done a day’s work in their lives. But just you go and visit the camps of the Chinese refugees here in Hongkong. You won’t find capitalists, industrialists and rich landowners. Those people fled too, of course, but you will find them in the more pleasant parts of the free world. Those among the rich who did not succeed in making their escape have been annihilated as a class, with the exception of those very few who, in compensation for services rendered, have been integrated

into the Communist system in highly remunerative sinecures, such as Madame Kung Peng, the daughter of a family of millionaires in the south, who is, at the moment, in charge of the Press Section of the Chinese Foreign Office, in which her husband is also a permanent official. No, sir, in the Chinese emigration you will find a simply overwhelming majority of ordinary, everyday people, whose calloused hands, their few simple belongings and their manner of speech prove conclusively that they are peasants, working men, fishermen, tradesmen and students, all with a lower-class background. What 'privileges' did the old régime give these people that they should be so soured and embittered at losing them under the Communist régime? The fact that the emigration at Coblenz consisted entirely of aristocrats and their servants proved conclusively that the French Revolution which had forced them to flee was directed against the aristocracy. Similarly, the fact that you find only simple, ordinary people as refugees here in Hongkong proves equally conclusively that the Communist revolution which forced them to flee is directed against the people. As the revolution is, so is the emigration."

"But the emigration here is not a mass exodus," objected my interlocutor. "There are perhaps 5,000,000 refugees for the whole of Asia, and there are 600,000,000 people in China. Obviously their complaints can't be typical for the state of mind of a whole people."

"Why not? The same proportion for the population of the United States would be 1,500,000, and for France 450,000: and that would have been quite enough to make you cry out in horror and indignation. Indeed, when and where did you ever see, in peace-time, 1,500,000 Americans, or 500,000 French men and women, flee their country leaving all their possessions behind them and cursing the régime which forced them to act in that way? Very much smaller emigrations, for example that of the Huguenots in 1670 and of the Communards in 1871, were taken, and rightly so, by the rest of the world as cogent proof of the fact that their land was subject to oppression. And if there were not a bamboo curtain with machine-guns guarding its interstices, the volume of the emigration would be ten, twenty, a hundred times as large as it is. But for that constricting band, the régime would explode into smithereens. Every time some chance local circumstance makes flight more easy and less hazardous, the percentage of the citizens of a Communist-ridden country which actually does flee increases very greatly. For example, in Vietnam 1,000,000 people

fled from north to south, against a few hundred who fled in the opposite direction. And in Korea, 4,000,000 out of 12,000,000, or thirty per cent. of the total population of North Korea, fled to the south. And again, 3,000,000 people out of a total population of 18,000,000 in Eastern Germany have—so far—fled westwards. And the process is still going on at an increasing speed. In fact it is true to say that no Communist régime could survive at all without that Iron Curtain, that belt of barbed wire with machine-gun posts, to keep the population in."

But the gentleman who had been and seen was not willing to give up so easily.

"Isn't it a fact," he demanded, "that long before the Communist revolution there were 15,000,000 Chinese living outside China in various Asiatic and American countries? The Chinese exodus does not date from the Communist revolution. The Chinese were always accustomed to emigrate in bad years."

"I'm glad that at least you admit one thing: that the 1,500,000 Chinese refugees in Hongkong are an indication that the Communist years are bad years for China! However, you have chosen to ignore one not unimportant dimension; that of time. Though it is quite true that there were approximately 15,000,000 Chinese outside China before the Communists came to add to that number, you forget that it was the result of, so to speak, alluvial settlement, and that it took place very gradually over the course of something like *three thousand years*; whereas in our own day it is a matter of 5,000,000 refugees in six years! And that isn't all. Those Chinese who decided to go abroad to make a new life for themselves before the arrival of Communism were able to plan their going in reasonable leisure and take their possessions with them, whereas those millions who fled from Communist China were glad to save just their bare lives. How many French people do you think you would find who would be prepared to lose everything—land, home, furniture, clothes, savings and personal treasures—in order to go abroad? Unless, of course, the régime under which they lived at home had become a hell on earth? And even that isn't all: those who emigrated before the coming of Communism did not do so at the risk of their lives. Today any attempt to leave China is at the risk of life and limb—but millions of Chinese do it all the same.

"But even so, the decisive difference lies elsewhere: those Chinese who emigrated in former years because of bad harvests and so on—in addition to the fact that their numbers were infinitely fewer and they

were infinitely freer to depart—invariably declared on their arrival, to anyone who cared to ask them, why they had come: ‘The heavens were inclement.’ They didn’t say with one accord: ‘The government robbed us of everything we possessed’—as these Chinese do. No, in those days the Chinese who left China were impelled by the same motives as all those Spaniards, Irishmen, Germans and Englishmen when they went overseas: their native soil did not offer them a living, and when they finally emigrated they left a little of themselves behind. I happen to have talked to scores of those Chinese who established themselves before the war in Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia, and not one of them harboured any hatred of the government which prevailed at the time of their emigration. In fact, many of them had only one idea: to save up enough money in their new country to be able to go back and spend the rest of their days in the home of their ancestors. And if you mentioned China to them, their eyes did not fill with terror, like the eyes of the refugees here in Rennie’s Hill and the other camps, but with longing.”

Had I after all moved some chord in the heart of Mao’s guest? He now remained silent, and I followed up my advantage.

“Believe me, the Chinese refugees of our day represent a major phenomenon of much greater significance than the airy boastings of the Chinese Communist leaders as brought back to us by their guests. Among the visitors who, like yourself, have merely skimmed the surface of the régime, there have not been many who did not feel themselves impressed by ‘historical evolution’, and who did not, for fear of being regarded as reactionary, admit that ‘in comparison with the Kuomintang the people at least were better off’. Up to now the only irrefutable argument—though of a negative nature in my eyes, I must confess—to be put forward against them, was the absence of free elections. After all, if ‘the people at least’ were better off under their new rulers they would be only too glad to demonstrate it to the world at large by their free votes. For a real democrat the absence of free elections is equivalent to the absence of approval on the part of the people.

“But today there is something even more trenchant to refute the Communist claims of popular support: the fate of 5,000,000 human beings, the refugees of Hongkong, Macao, Burma and Formosa. With them and through them the Chinese people has voted before the world at large. It has voted in the only way still remaining open to it—with its feet. And it has voted overwhelmingly and indisputably anti-

Communist. Now it is not only the muzzled silence of the great masses of the Chinese people which disproves the lie that Mao and his friends enjoy popular support, but the loud 'No!' hammered by each step of each one of those millions of wretched people fleeing through every little gap and chink in the Great Wall of China."

ARE THE CHINESE PEOPLE REALLY WORKING FOR THEMSELVES?

MAO's guest—the gentleman who had been “on the spot”—and I were among those invited to a reception at the French Consulate in Victoria. We went there together, and the crossing, with the two hours we subsequently spent on the terrace of the Consulate with its panoramic view over the colony, gave us time to continue our chat at leisure.

“That vast infrastructure which will allow the doubling of Chinese living standards in the near future, isn't a propaganda fable,” he insisted, following up his original idea. “That's not a Potemkin village, I assure you. You can't deny that even for the visitor there is that huge decisive sector of reality which the Communists cannot fake—the industrialisation. Whoever has eyes in his head can see, whoever has hands can touch the dams, the rails, the bridges and the factories. I would even go so far as to say that whoever has ears can hear the tremendous growth of production. The millions of tons of building which are going up everywhere cannot be faked; and they convey only one message—that of progress.”

And to convince me he began to produce figures: tons of steel and cement rising everywhere; rails crossing and recrossing, and lengthening from Mongolia to the China Sea and from Tibet to Shantung; the mines being dug into the ground; anthracite erupting from the bowels of the earth; iron being forged; steel rolled; investments increasing; percentages climbing. “In ten years' time they will have overtaken Britain,” he declared enthusiastically. With this we had come to the core of the Communist argument: cement! Cement is the source of light in the world today. Cement is the source of approval and fame. Cement is the subject of all theses. By cement are all revolutions henceforth to be judged.

We were still on our way at that time, and a polite Chinese, who was also going to the reception, asked if he might join in the conversation. His name was Tang, and it appeared that he had studied law at the

University of Paris, and was now lecturing on political economy in Hongkong. His gentle voice persuaded me at once that he was a brother spirit—this side of cement.

"If you will permit me, sir," he said to my figure-drunk companion, "I should like to warn you against accepting the figures of Peking at their face value. By profession I have to study them, and I can assure you that no more cooked and adulterated data ever emerged from government offices anywhere in the world. Very often, for the same category, there are differences of up to 100 per cent. between one day and the next, and between one department and the other. It was Stalin, you will perhaps remember, who discovered that statistics can serve as 'a weapon in the class struggle'. In consequence all Communist states regard it as a duty to juggle with them at will; trumpeting out the figures of production for tomorrow, and whispering the figures of production today."

"And I must say I find it astonishing," I put in, "that you haven't yet been able to see through Communist statistical rodomontade. You must have noticed, for example, that for twenty-five years now the Soviet Union has been boasting that its production is about to exceed that of the United States, and that for twenty-five years all the figures for past production have shown that it was mere boasting."

"Believe me," went on Dr. Tang, "in ten years' time the production of my country will still be a long way behind that of Great Britain. Even so, one wonders why they are so anxious to compare our industrial production with that of a country which has only one-tenth of our population. But that, of course, is just another dialectical trick. If you really want a capitalist country with which to compare our industrial production, then the only sensible choice is the United States. Even with our 'great leap forward' China produced only 12 million tons of steel in 1958, and even then half of it was from rural furnaces and of a quality not suitable for modern industrial uses. But the United States produced 160 million tons of high-quality steel annually, or 1,500 per cent. more for a country with one-third of our population. As the rate of increase is three per cent. per annum in the United States, it will be producing 250 million tons of steel in ten years from now. Do you really think that China will increase its production of steel by 2,000 per cent. in ten years? We have a good deal of coal, it is true, but it is not cokefiable. We have a lot of minerals scattered all over the country, but the yield is of poor quality. We have no machine-tool industry. Electronics is just a name for us. We have no

high-quality metallurgical industry. We have no organic chemistry. Intense muscular effort is what is demanded of the population, and not for the production of steel, but for the collection of scrap. Millions of Chinese earn their living at the moment collecting scrap metal for the authorities: door handles, saucepan handles, pans, and so on. And, above all, anyone who has the slightest knowledge of political economy knows that a country which has no means of importing the foodstuffs it needs cannot industrialise itself without the support of an effective agriculture capable of releasing masses of labour power for the factories and at the same time feeding them cheaply. Now, not only is the arable land available in China very limited, but our agricultural production is lower than anywhere else in the world. For example, an American farmer can produce enough to feed twenty-seven other people, an agricultural worker on a Soviet Kolkhoze can just about feed six, and not very well at that, whereas a Chinese peasant can barely keep 1.2 people alive. The United States uses 4.5 million tons of fertiliser for an area of 345 million acres. The Soviet Union uses 1.4 million tons for an area of 456 million acres. China uses only 0.2 million tons for 407 million acres. And these hard facts explain why in certain speeches intended purely for internal consumption the Communist leaders admit that the boasted achievements are impossible. For example, in March 1958, when Po I Po proudly announced the figures of the 'great leap forward', which were immediately taken at their face value by the sensational press in the West, Hsie Pei-yi was saying, at the same time, but for internal consumption, that it would take China twenty years to mechanise her agriculture to the level, not of the United States, mark you, but of Europe. You will find his observations on the point in No. 3 of the *Current Affairs Handbook* for that year."

Our companion tried to escape by launching a counter-attack.

"Supposing we admit that Communist statistics are to some extent exaggerated, and knock off thirty per cent.—even more if you wish. What still remains is a degree of industrial progress unique in history; particularly when you take into account the fact that China is starting absolutely from scratch. Anyone who has been to China and seen for himself must be so convinced of that, that if you cut the figures down by three-quarters he would still remain convinced. When I say progress unique in history I am wrong, of course. Such a thing has happened before, once only, and that was in Soviet Russia; that is to say, also under a Communist régime. Why don't you admit that for

carrying societies from a state of ancestral stagnation into a state of modern progress the Communists stand alone?"

"To begin with you are mistaken in one thing," I pointed out, "and that is the supposed state of scratch from which Communism in both Russia and China is supposed to have started. That supposed contrast has been worked to death by Communist legend in order to enhance the merit of Communist achievements. For example, in 1917 Tsarist Russia had hundreds of the most modern factories in Europe. Both Lenin and Trotsky stressed this point in order to justify their own plans against the more cautious and timid Menshevists. Further, Tsarist Russia had a number of excellent universities which turned out first-class scientists and engineers. It was perhaps not a great deal by comparison with the more advanced industrial countries of the world, but it was a great deal by comparison with the supposed state of scratch which Communists now claim to have existed."

"That's more or less what China had when the Communists came to power," said Dr. Tang, "and that wasn't by any means a state of scratch. We possessed three big modern industrial centres in Manchuria, Shanghai and Hankow; and they were seconded by powerful artisanal and commercial centres in Canton, Tientsin and Peking. The first batch of qualified labour power, the first railways, and the first contingent of Chinese technicians were already at work. In addition to these inherited industrial bases, Communist China has largely built up its new industrial progress with foreign aid from the Soviet Union; in fact, just as the Soviet Union did from 1925 onwards by the importation of German and American machinery.

"You said, sir, that there were no other examples of industrial progress as speedy as that in the Soviet Union and in present-day China, and you left the suggestion open that this great progress was on account of their Communist régimes. Now I know that this notion is very widespread in the world today, but it is false nevertheless, and many economic studies have already demonstrated its falsity. As a basis of comparison, let us take a fairly long period, as one always must to integrate exceptional phenomena—say, twenty-five years—and then let us begin from equivalent levels. We then find that in Japan between 1880 and 1905, in the United States between 1870 and 1895, in South Africa between 1910 and 1935, in Germany, France and Switzerland between 1860 and 1885, and in Tsarist Russia—yes, in Tsarist Russia!—between 1890 and 1915, the rate of progress in the heavy-industrial sector was everywhere as great as, or even greater

than, it was in the Soviet Union between 1930 and 1955 (in Japan, for example, it was almost three times as great); and that at the same time it was almost everywhere very much greater in the consumer-goods sector. In the matter of dynamic progress no Communist country can offer anything to compare with, say, those famous 'mushroom' towns which sprang up in the United States, at São Paulo, and in Venezuela and whose population went into the millions in the space of five or ten years—and not the way Soviet and Chinese new towns grow up, mark you, but with all modern conveniences and public utilities: railways, roads, hospitals, schools, housing, theatres and so on."

"And do you happen to know," I asked our companion, "that the capital in which the most building is going on at the moment is Madrid? Yes, Madrid, in the heart of reactionary Fascism. Whole networks of building have grown up within a matter of a few years. And building in Borneo is making more rapid progress than it is in Communist China."

"And no Communist country," went on Dr. Tang, "has anything to offer which can compare with the fantastic speed at which the United States, France and Germany were covered with a network of railways during the nineteenth century. And yet the railway network is one of the favourite propaganda spheres of Mao and his friends. Very well, he built 5,000 miles of railway in ten years, whereas in ten years from 1855 France built almost 9,000 miles, and in the ten years from 1885 the United States built almost 50,000 miles! And for road building and electrification, one of the record-holders in mileage and kilowatts at the present time is Formosa, under the 'feudal reactionary' Chiang Kai-shek; and that beats Mao's China hollow, and even beats the Venezuela of Standard Oil."

"You will observe," I pointed out to our companion, "that among the countries which beat both Soviet Russia and Communist China in this matter of modern industrial progress there are régimes of all political complexions, apart from Communist. They range from the country of the absolutist Son of Heaven, the Emperor of Japan, to a country which elects its magistrates by popular acclaim on the spot, namely Switzerland, and they include enlightened despotisms such as Hohenzollern Germany, a plutocratic republic such as the United States, a semi-colonial country like South Africa, and a middle-class republic like France."

"But the world record for rapid industrial progress is still held by that most archaic of all régimes, Imperial Japan," said Dr. Tang.

"Now with regard to Japan you might really talk of fantastic progress. Japan is the only country of which you could truthfully say that it started from scratch. When its industrialisation began in 1870 Japan possessed perhaps fifty lathes and milling machines; and they were all in the arsenal at Nagasaki, where foreign ships put in for repairs. There wasn't a single railway in the whole country; not a single Japanese knew anything about algebra; and a law of the Shoguns passed in 1715 still forbade all mechanical inventions with the exception of those designed for the presentation of theatrical pieces. But only twenty-five years later Japan possessed a modern fleet, and men to sail and fight it so expertly that it annihilated the Russian fleet, with its traditions from the days of Peter the Great."

"And yet," I interposed, "no one dreamt of suggesting that on account of this fantastically rapid progress the Mitsui régime was a model of social progress for the rest of the world to admire and follow."

"You see, sir," went on Dr. Tang, who was so carried away by this conversation about a subject on which he was so well informed that he hardly allowed our poor Maoist companion to get a word in edgewise, "when people look at Communist industrialisation they usually commit two optical errors which completely distort the whole picture. The first is that, because Mao makes such a to-do about his new factories, the world is so hypnotised by the stones that it forgets the masons. Now in the United States they not only build great undertakings of national importance, but in addition, and every year at that, they produce twelve million motor cars, six hundred million pairs of shoes, six million houses complete with baths, refrigerators, telephones and washing-machines; and, in addition, they produce sufficient food to give everyone a nourishing and tasty diet of steak, milk, fruit juice, and so on, amounting to 3,000 calories a day per person. Everything develops at the same time and to the same extent; there is no shortage of this or that commodity. Together with the great dams, they also produce vast quantities of electric bulbs; together with the giant rolling-mills they turn out motor cars for the ordinary citizen; with the great blast-furnaces there are gas and electric cookers for the housewife, and suits, dresses and shoes for all. In all democratic countries the amount invested in administration, arms and heavy industry does not exceed three parts of the ten they devote to the production of consumer goods for the benefit of all, whereas in the totalitarian countries they invest ten parts in the former and only two

parts in the latter. In other words, in Communist countries cement comes before consumer goods.

"Thus the first mistake is to concentrate on what the Communist régimes do and forget what they fail to do. The second is to attribute all they achieve to the régimes as such. Go back to the days of the foreign concessions in China: how many steelworks, railways, dams and so on were erected by private enterprise? And yet no one made any particular fuss about it. But everything which is done today is regarded as issuing exclusively from the divine effort of the Central Committee. At one time a bridge was just a bridge; today it is the incarnation of Communism. Believe me, sir [Dr. Tang invariably addressed himself to my companion], this whole business of unexampled industrialism thanks to Communism is nothing but an unexampled illusion which will not bear even cursory comparison with the figures. I am weighing my words when I say that it is nothing but an unexampled piece of publicity bluff which owes its success to an unexampled piece of orchestration."

"Plus unexampled gullibility," I murmured.

Our poor Maoist friend wriggled uncomfortably for a moment, and seemed to be gathering his strength for a new effort, and so Dr. Tang and I remained silent, feeling that we really had rather overwhelmed him. He now abandoned the sphere of general graphs for that of salient performances, and proceeded to enumerate the giant labour of Mao-Hercules.

"What can you find anywhere in the world to compare with the hydraulic works at Houai, which extend over more than two miles, or the even bigger works on the Hoang Ho with their giant reservoirs, their dams and their lateral canals? France built its railways through populated areas, whereas China has to build the Chengtu-Chungking, the Tiangchow-Langchow and the Sinkiang-Tibet lines through deserts and mountainous terrain. Do you deny that great mining, metallurgical and oil centres have been stamped out of the ground in Langchow, Paotu and Yumen? Do you deny the existence of the atomic works at Kuldja, and the fantastic, almost fairylike railway bridge over the Yangtsekiang at Hankow?"

"No, I don't deny them," I replied, "but I would just like to remind you that the free world is dotted with no less spectacular performances though they don't induce *you* to conclude that capitalism is sublime. Is it fantastic, almost fairylike, bridges you want? What about the Golden Gate at San Francisco, which is four times as long and

six times as high as the bridge you mention at Hankow. Or go to the Clyde, and there you will see a bridge 650 feet above a river foaming between rocky walls. Or is it great dams you want? Go to the Zuiderzee, where a small country like Holland has built the longest and widest dam in the world. It is eighteen miles long, and it holds back the sea itself, and behind it there are 500,000 acres of land which have been reclaimed from the sea. Or do you want examples of virgin land brought into cultivation? Go to Tennessee where, in an area one-fifth the size of France, you will find a river as big and powerful as our Rhône, which has previously always devastated the surrounding countryside by inundations and erosion. Within the space of fifteen years the Tennessee Valley Authority has turned this vast area of recurrent catastrophe into one of the most prosperous areas in the world. It has built nineteen dams, each one almost three-quarters of a mile long and over 190 feet high, damming a string of lakes with an area of almost 40,000 acres, providing sixteen milliard kilowatt hours and irrigating vast areas where the process of erosion has been halted. At the same time the population of the surrounding area has increased fivefold. And all this has been done without forced-labour camps and without a dictatorship—just by free and harmonious co-operation between the authorities and the local population. And if that isn't enough, I can offer you even more in the way of dams and hydraulic works which 'change the face of nature', as you are so fond of saying. And you needn't go to the antipodes to see it all either. When you get back to France, just go to Donzères-Mondragon, where you will find engineers and workmen engaged in deflecting the course of the Rhône.

"But if you prefer to go on long journeys to see your marvels, why always go east? Go to Canada, for example, a country with only fifteen million inhabitants, and there you can see the really extraordinary Kemano-Kitimat combination, which shortens the meandering flow of the waters of seven lakes from 500 miles to about thirty-five and guides them straight into the Pacific. Those non-Communists there have turned seven great lakes into one, and they have bored two tunnels through the Rocky Mountains each ten miles long and each ejecting about 1,000 tons of water per second into the underground works of Kemano, where there are sixteen giant turbines; and that hall is nearly 400 yards long, almost thirty yards wide and over 100 feet high, all dug out of solid granite, and connected with the outside world by another tunnel a quarter of a mile long. And as for the

cables which carry the current, they are the biggest in the world and carry a million and a quarter non-Communist kilowatts across about sixty miles of lunar landscape so barren that the elements to build the pylons to carry them had to be brought in by helicopter. They lead to a hyper-modern town of 50,000 inhabitants created *ex professo* out of nothing, together with an aluminium plant which turns out 500,000 tons a year; that is to say, four times the total production of the Soviet Union.

"And then, of course, the British have done a thing or two; tamed the Nile, for example. And they are in the course of taming the Zambesi. And should the Swiss be forgotten? They have tunnelled through mountains and sawn off mountain-tops in order to take the railway to the most inaccessible places. The Germans—and while Germany was Nazi too—criss-crossed the country with outstanding motor-roads, while even the Fascist Mussolini reclaimed the Pontine marshes. The French are not far behind either: what about the great constructional works at Abidjan? And the remarkable work in the Sahara, where petrol wells are shooting up like mushrooms, and a great pipeline is moving forward to the Mediterranean at the rate of more than two miles a day? Finally, what about the great complex at Lacq, where a dense forest of pipes and motors has sprung up within the space of three years?"

"And do you know," interposed Dr. Tang in support, "that right here in Hongkong building operations are nothing short of spectacular? On one occasion a mountain-top was levelled and a seven-storey building with 800 rooms was built within eight weeks. One of the major headaches of the colony was to cope with the air traffic which is growing at the rate of twenty per cent. per annum. It became absolutely necessary to enlarge the airfield at Kai Tak. But where was the ground to be taken from? Well, it was obtained by levelling the hills and filling in the sea. Something like two and a half million tons of earth and rock were shifted, and at the same time land was reclaimed from the sea to an extent comparable with the great Zuyderzee operations. A great platform was built to accommodate a runway over a mile long reaching as far as the Bay of Kowloon. And the work was carried out by the *Compagnie des Dragages de France*, an undertaking which has done a good deal to consolidate French prestige in the Far East."

Looking over the Victoria littoral, literally wrenched from the sea, with its magnificent docks, its great transatlantic 30,000-tonners,

and the foundries of Ma On Shan, it struck me that if all this industrial activity had grown up under Mao it would have been drummed into us as a Communist miracle. But because it had all been built a few miles outside Mao's territory, a free and humane society, no one gave it a second thought or was moved to the slightest enthusiasm. I sighed.

"It seems to me that industrialism is worthy of your enthusiasm only when it is carried out by serfs under the despotism of a bureaucracy, supported by brutal purges to the accompaniment of loud-speakers churning out communiqués, threats and reproaches; only when the slaves are uniformed in boiler-suits, lodged in barracks, driven around like cattle, deprived of the right to strike, and forced to work up to exhausting norms. Only then is industrialisation sublime."

Mao's guest preferred to ignore my weary sarcasm, and he went on: "I don't deny that capitalism too has shown technical brilliance, but it works within an anarchy of private interests without regard to the rightful share of the masses. Against a lack of necessities on the one hand, luxury goods for the few are launched with an orgy of publicity. Between two powerful dams, how many mere sops for the people! If you will allow me to paraphrase Edmond Rostand, the great achievements of capitalism are like the brilliant dots on the 'i's in the substantive *crisis*. Capitalism produces so much and so well that the coal piles up at the pitheads while the unemployed miners who produced it go cold. Bananas are thrown into the sea while children go hungry. Without counting the enormous wastage caused by the war industries. On the other hand, technical development in Communist countries is part of a rational plan in a coherent whole which eliminates, among other things, unemployment."

My ears were still burning with all the things the refugees had told me about the scourge of unemployment in Communist China, and I repeated them for the benefit of Mao's guest, whilst Dr. Tang supported me with documents he produced from his brief-case.

"It so happens, sir, that you have touched on the subject of my latest lecture: the chaos in Chinese Communist 'planned production'," he said. "Because the defects—which are very real—in Communist production provide an excellent basis for accusations of sabotage—which are fabricated—against scapegoats chosen to be the purge victims, they are given a good deal of space in the campaigns of denunciations. The result is that my only difficulty in putting evidence

of unbelievable waste and negligence before you is that there is so much of it. But here are a few examples taken at random from the Chinese Communist press recently:

"The *People's Daily* of January 14, 1958, reveals that the motors produced at the Tientsin works—one of those which is invariably shown to visitors, by the way—cost as much to maintain as they do to produce. The *New China* of January 12, and the *Ta Kung Pao* of March 6, both report that hundreds of thousands of eggs were allowed to go bad outside a refrigerating depôt because the invoices were not made out correctly. Ten drilling machines bought expensively in Switzerland were left to deteriorate in the yard of a sheet-metal works because two spare parts were missing. And, a particularly shocking piece of information, half the area cleared by forced labour was allowed to slide back into its original wild state owing to lack of tools and irrigation. Similarly, nothing was done to step up the production of copper in accordance with the increased supply of electric current from the newly built dams. In fact the number of instances of bureaucratic muddle are so fantastic that one despairs of getting anyone to believe it. Here is just one example taken from the *Ta Kung Pao* of Peking on December 25, 1957: the brewery in Kunming continued to function, with forty-nine officials to every hundred workers, for one full year after a decision to close it down had been taken; and in that period it produced nothing but memoranda concerning its production. . . .

"Would you like further examples? Take the scourge denounced by the Communist Party as 'departmentalism'. It means that in its anxiety to fulfil its own part of the plan, one department does not hesitate to damage the interests of all the others. For example, the grain-handling corporation refuses to put space, of which it has an abundance, at the disposal of the grain-storage office. A chemical works refuses to place its laboratory at the disposal of the office for the analysis of medicaments. The ice trust cuts down the supplies to fishing boats, with the result that fish goes bad. You can find dozens of such reports in the *People's Daily*; for example, in the numbers of December 3, 1957, and March 11, 1958. And there is another scourge, referred to as giving way to panic. It is best illustrated by a report in the *People's Daily* of December 25, 1957, referring to a factory for the production of cement pipes planned to complement the Wuhan industrial complex. After it was built it was dismantled at once because it was discovered that a similar factory already existed in the neighbourhood. But then it was decided that production would, after all, be more

economical if it were carried out as part of the Wuhan industrial complex, so the second factory was dismantled, and the other one, which had just been dismantled, was built up again. According to the Party, many of the dams on the Hoang Ho were constructed 'in feverish haste' and proved unable to stand up to the first serious test. In fact I could keep you here until tomorrow morning listening to one after another of such instances from the chaos which exists under Communist bureaucracy, a chaos inevitable in a régime which doesn't know the difference between the 'knout' and 'discipline', or between 'propaganda' and 'reality'."

"And it would be all the more useless because you would succeed in convincing no one," put in Mao's guest. "For years now I have heard the same stories about Soviet industry. And then the Soviet Union launched its sputniks into space, and left the doubters flabbergasted. For the West, which had believed such stories, the awakening was an unpleasant one."

"And nevertheless the doubters were right," I insisted. "Isn't it rather like intellectual dishonesty to deny the anarchism which exists in Communist economy because of special exploits, whereas similar and even greater exploits accomplished by the capitalist system have never prevented anyone from denouncing its anarchy? And remember that the Soviet economy enjoys a power so absolute over the masses that even with a yield considerably lower than that of a free economy its output can become considerable in absolute value, particularly in chosen spheres on which the régime can concentrate exceptional means while sacrificing all the rest. And that was the case with the artificial satellites. The Soviet Union got ahead of the United States in that respect only because it took the matter up five years earlier and concentrated enormous credits on it. And yet, from the standpoint of a country's real interests, artificial satellites do not justify that vast expenditure."

"If you will excuse my disagreeing with you," put in Dr. Tang, "I think you are wrong there. They justify it from their point of view as an instrument of propaganda. It should never be forgotten that a Communist is essentially a political animal, and that his strength derives almost entirely from propaganda. It is by propaganda that he hopes to dominate the world. And his undertakings are therefore designed to fill the columns of the newspapers with sensations rather than the plates of the common people with food. From this point of view the money spent on the sputniks was worth while; for example,

you, sir, are so deeply impressed that you seem almost ready to sacrifice your liberty for the sake of those bleep-bleeps."

"And," I interposed, "even the exploits in that particular sphere, to which excessive attention has been devoted, were possible only because the Communist régime for once abandoned its totalitarian nature. Khrushchev boasted of the relative freedom of action which he granted to scientists and technicians engaged in that particular sphere, without realising that thereby he thus rather naïvely admitted that to succeed he had to fall back on Western methods. . . . It is to them and not to Communism that the credit for the sputniks is due."

"That is true," agreed Dr. Tang. "The sputniks prove once again that no science can exist without a modicum of liberty. And of all sciences which need oxygen for their development, the science which languishes first for lack of it is the science of man himself, of which sociology is only one branch. And this is the science which orthodox Communism stifles, much more than the exact sciences. How, sir, do you suppose that an economy can be guided according to reason under a régime in which reason is subjected to censorship?"

"The utmost you can grant Communist economy," I added, "is that on the whole what you might call its 'index of rationality' is *not inferior* to that of capitalist economy; that is to say, taking one year with another, the two proceed by trial and error and suffer from approximately the same troubles. And even that is true only of that Moloch, heavy industry. Where the human sphere of production is concerned, that is to say, the production of consumer goods for the people, just everything under Communism is nothing short of lamentable."

"I find you too indulgent, Madame," said Dr. Tang. "The fact is that there is very much more anarchy at all stages of the economic system under Communism. It certainly never throws goods into the sea—for the simple reason that it never manages to produce sufficient goods and is therefore never troubled with a surplus. But if it did, I guarantee that it would much rather throw that surplus into the sea than send it to help that arch-revisionist Tito, for example. However, it does something far worse than destroying surplus commodities; it destroys the lives of men. It destroys all those who are unwilling to submit to its orthodoxy. And that is a very much greater waste than the destruction of surplus cotton or coffee. An economy in which the very foundation of production—man—is killed for reasons of political conformism, is hardly a shining example of rationalism, you must admit.

"It has been calculated that in order to produce a given commodity unit the Communist régimes need from eight to ten times as many controllers, supervisors, planners, spies, censors, propagandists and police than do capitalist régimes. And that unique parasitism, which is called political oppression, represents a far greater burden on Communist production than private profit represents on capitalist production. Just now, you mentioned the burden of military expenditure as handicapping capitalist economy. But the truth is that no régime anywhere has ever imposed such an enormous military burden on its economy as Communism has. You mentioned the waste represented by bourgeois advertising and publicity, but Communist economy is almost entirely a matter of publicity. The bureaucrats who exploit it, and found their power on a creed, rise in the hierarchy not by satisfying the needs of the consumer but by satisfying the theses of their superiors. And from this devolve all those typically irrational features of the Communist economy: publicity-inspired haste, propaganda delirium, the faking of accounts, the urge to outdo fixed norms (which is just as irrational as the failure to achieve them), and the Black Market in raw materials, tools and labour power. That, sir, is the obverse side of Communist planning. Because the dictatorship is watching everywhere, ready at any moment with its propaganda roar and its whip, the directors of the State-run concerns outbid each other, and fight each other tooth and nail behind the scenes for those essential elements of the economy which, according to the brave words resounding from so many public platforms, are supposed to be distributed rationally according to plans. Now, if there is one thing that a real plan ought to be able to keep under control, it is money, the measure of all economies. But look at our wretched yuan! It is constantly deteriorating in purchasing power, and our 'scientific planners' watch the deplorable process as helplessly as the most anarchical governments of the *laissez-faire* economies."

"But the Chinese Communists are really only just starting up, and naturally there are teething troubles. You must give them time to serve their apprenticeship. . . ."

"That might be a point of view," I admitted. "But if they are, as you suggest, apprentices, why do they claim to be able to give lessons to the rest of the world?"

"Because although they have not yet sufficient *experience*, at least they possess the superior *principle* of economic planning."

"Are their principles of planning, which lead to forced labour,

slavery and death, really so very superior? If there really is one aspect in which the undertaking you praise so highly really is unexampled, it is in its high cost in human suffering. The labourers at work on the dams and canals of North China work in water at a temperature of — 10° Centigrade, coping with the lumps of ice floating downstream in the fast currents. Bagging is often carried out with their bare backs. They work in teams of three. One of them lies horizontally and the other two push his body, using it as a kind of rake to move the mud. The workmen who build the electric-power stations are housed in kennels unfit for dogs, fed on food unfit for dogs, ordered around in tones a man wouldn't use to his dog in the West, and forced to toil like oxen. And the mountains of earth that have been shifted were carried away in small baskets, one at each end of a pole carried over the shoulder from morning to night by female labour.

"The refugees here have told me that overwork, together with a lack of all hygiene and any safety measures, leads to accidents and sickness—and I am confining myself to their statistical incidence—which inflict a far more costly burden on Chinese Communist economy than unemployment ever did on capitalist economy."

"In China that particular phenomenon is called 'fever unemployment'," said Dr. Tang. "To industrialise by hunger, exhaustion and hecatombs of corpses is within the scope of the meanest sergeant-major. But what I don't understand, sir, is how a man of your intelligence can glorify an undertaking comparable only with the building of the Pyramids. Do you know where technical progress was the swiftest in history? It was in Manchuria under the Japanese, where, in the short space of ten years, the Empire of the Rising Sun built up its own Ruhr—and without outside assistance. New towns housing millions of people grew up from nothing. The black earth of Fushun and the red earth of Anshan was burrowed and tunnelled and pitted in order to extract its coal and iron. Fourfold railway lines criss-crossed the country. The whole province, as large as the whole of France, was electrified, taking its power above all from the famous gigantic electric-power stations at Yalu.

"But that prodigious technical achievement was condemned by the whole of the civilised world, because it was carried out under the Japanese jack-boot and exhausted a whole labour army reduced to utter impoverishment. At that time you and your friends rightly ignored the great blast-furnaces and saw only the starvation wages. Very well, but why do you now praise the blast-furnaces and ignore

the starvation wages? As far as the social efficiency is concerned, that is to say the result obtained by comparison with the human effort involved—and that is the only authentic criterion for the quality of any régime—Communist industrialisation occupies the last place in the world. It has used up vastly more human blood and sweat per kilowatt-unit installed than was ever used up in the United States or in any other democratic country. I don't know of any other dams, hydraulic works, electric-power stations and so on which have cost so much in human suffering as those of China. And even if, after twenty-five years of such suffering, Communist China does catch up with British production figures what virtue will there be in it? Where will the great achievement lie?"

There was silence now. All three of us felt a little embarrassed: my fellow countryman because he had failed to see all that; Dr. Tang because he was stirred by the tragedy of his country; and I because I felt sorry for Mao's guest. Once more I felt a kind of bitter sadness at the blind partiality of the so-called intellectual *avant-garde* in the West. How they bubble and boil when some capitalist enterprise treats its workers badly! Who doesn't recall Upton Sinclair exposing, in words so admirably filled with revolt and pity, the sufferings of the Chicago building workers under capitalism—150 dead to 10,000 men employed? Bad, true, but a fleabite compared with the hecatombs of victims in the yards at Sinkiang. And then there was André Gide thundering away, with a superb contempt for "economic realism", against the Congo dam because the coloured labourers were recruited by force and driven to work by whips—as all workers are under Communism. It was from such writings that my socialist feelings, and those of my whole generation, were inspired, and they still make me thrill today as they did then. Cement which is accursed because it has been mixed with human blood and tears has become a classic theme in the denunciation of exploiters. But our intellectual *avant-garde* today loses all human feelings when it is a question of Communist cement. Then it sees no human suffering at all, only the cement!

Our friend Mao's guest broke the silence in an attempt to remedy the bad impression he was creating in the eyes of Dr. Tang—and perhaps just a little even in his own.

"Granted that the Communists have a rather heavy hand in this matter of industrialisation; all the same, the result remains impressive. The 'great leap forward' which they are carrying out on behalf of their country, which up to the present has been practically asleep in the

Middle Ages, will take it at one bound into modern times. The Communist police will ultimately fade away, but the Communist factories will remain."

"It is true," I said, "that when the dead are dead and all their sufferings are over, trains will still run through Sinkiang; but if that is to be taken as an excuse for everything that went before, then it must also be taken as an excuse for imperialist colonialism too. For example, France has built railways in Algeria—and at a much lower cost in blood and sweat. As I understand you, the democratic bourgeoisie has not been fly enough to harness history in its service; it has a right only to a tip-up seat in the immediate present, and you judge it as you would a commoner, by its acts. Only Communism, subject exclusively to the dialectical law, has the right to a proper seat in the historical process of centuries; and you judge it, as one judges a nobleman, by his coat of arms. The blood shed daily by Communism is of no importance; all that counts is the historic significance of its works. But the works achieved by democracy have no historic significance; all that counts is the offences it commits yearly. In consequence you never hear a 'progressive intellectual' talking about Algeria except in terms of the past injustices, whereas at the same time you never hear him talking about China except in terms of tomorrow's railways."

"That is very true," said Dr. Tang, "and the Communist dictators have very good reason to honour Karl Marx, for he left them an invaluable legacy: a brilliant phraseology thanks to which they are able to lend an air of creativeness to the cruellest exploitation. The 'Historical process', as you say, is the coat of arms of Communism."

"I am amazed that you can't see the difference!" exclaimed our companion. "The children exploited in the time of Dickens, the Japanese coolies, the Silesian weavers, and so on, were worked to death in order that fine ladies and gentlemen could ride around in carriages. But in Communist countries, although the people admittedly have to work very hard, it is for themselves. The Chinese workers slave with their bare hands today in order to obtain the tools and the machinery which will make it unnecessary for them—or at least for their children—to slave with their bare hands tomorrow. They are not toiling and sweating for the profit of an exploiter but for a harvest which they themselves will enjoy. There is nothing revolting about a willingly accepted sacrifice, however great. I find there is even something exalting about a people who, up till yesterday, looked only backward, but who have now discovered that their past was pitiful,

and who are now enthusiastic for their own future, enthusiastic enough to dredge rivers with their own bodies. Hasn't it always been regarded as splendid for a man to move mountains with his bare hands in order to erect his own house?"

"Ah, there we have it!" interjected Dr. Tang. "The last ditch of Communist argument! Under capitalism the people toil and sweat for their exploiters; under Communism they toil and sweat for themselves. But what proof is there of that, sir? The mere assertions of Communist leaders won't do. Since when in politics was anyone prepared to accept the words of political leaders at their face value without comparing them with the facts?"

"Allow me to remind you, sir," I said to my fellow countryman, "that while you sit here comfortably embroidering the historical process in an armchair, the Chinese people are shifting the stones of that same historical process in the Sinkiang desert. Now you and I both belong to a tradition which isn't inclined to take the brave words of the base for the heroism of the front line—at least not where the bourgeois world is concerned. So please don't do it where the Communist world is concerned, either."

"If the Chinese people are really working 'for themselves' as you say," went on Dr. Tang, "why do they torture themselves with such exhausting norms and such frantic haste? A homeless man will turn himself into a mason to build himself a home, and he will willingly accept all the hard work involved. And that, as you rightly say, is exalting. But even so, just now and again, when he feels like it, he will have a rest, and maybe stroll along to the pub on the corner for a drink. And even while he's working hard, you'll see the gleam of satisfaction in his eyes as he thinks of his future home. After all, his hard work isn't going to last a lifetime and he is building something which he will enjoy in the foreseeable future. In other words, the intensity, the duration and the finality of his labours have that true human measure which marks the special effort a man makes willingly for his own happiness. Now, if instead of being satisfied with abstract phraseology you would use your imagination to realise in human terms the overwork, the undernourishment, the cruel discipline and the terror which Communism imposes on whole generations for decades at a time, then you would realise how absurd it is to suggest for one moment that any people would willingly impose that on themselves. The simplest common sense, the most elementary sense of proportion as between the stake and the objective, would make them spread out the effort in

tolerable instalments. Left to themselves they would quite naturally take care that their journey, though perhaps onerous, would not be a Calvary; and they would see to it that it provided them with minor satisfactions from time to time as they went forward. Or do you think the Chinese are a nation of masochists? Or do you perhaps believe in redemption by suffering? I must say that your Communism reminds me of those primitive religions whose gods are appeased only by human sacrifices."

Dr. Tang paused, but as our companion made no reply, he continued: "No, the Chinese people are no more masochists than any other. And the dictatorship under which they are compelled to live is the patent proof that they do not willingly work themselves to death. Even assuming that a people working for themselves might conceivably impose such forced labour on themselves, and work at semi-starvation wages subjected to the harsh discipline of galley slaves, it still seems difficult to understand why in addition they should gag themselves. On the contrary, if that onerous and exhausting labour and discipline were in accordance with their own wishes they would be only too anxious to make it clear in every possible way, and particularly by free elections. They would obviously compensate their economic frugalities by political pride. Real masters may work as hard as men, but in their leisure hours they behave unmistakably as masters. The idea that that fantastic effort is being made willingly and enthusiastically by the Chinese masses is conclusively contradicted by the fact that the same masses have absolutely nothing to say in the shaping of the policy to be followed. Worse than that: they suffer cruel punishments if they so much as breathe a word of criticism of that policy. Even supposing that a whole people condemned themselves to a whole lifetime of misery and suffering for the benefit of future generations, why should they inflict terror on themselves, in addition? How can you suppose that the building is going on in the interests of the labourer when that same labourer trembles before the kanpou?"

The almond eyes of Dr. Tang scrutinised us for signs of disapproval of the ridiculous idea that a whole people working for themselves would, in addition, burden themselves with a dictatorship. Our Maoist friend, who had seen so much, according to his own account, had not noticed this inconsistency, and he was silent, obviously searching for some dialectical jiggery-pokery to help him out of the impasse.

"Dr. Tang is right, you know," I put in. "When working people

are gagged it can't be and never is in their own interests, but in order to exploit them. That is a cardinal truth of which you make liberal use when it suits you; that is to say, when it applies to the capitalist world. The number of policemen employed to watch the masses serves you as a sort of measure for the intensity of their exploitation. So why don't you apply the same measure to Communist China? The fact that the Chinese people are not allowed to vote, or to express their views freely, is proof enough that they are not working for themselves but for others. In other words, what they are creating is not their future paradise but their present hell."

The eyes of Dr. Tang sparkled. "That's very true!" he exclaimed. "Those sound commonsense maxims are amply confirmed in Communist China. A people has rarely worked so little for itself and so much for others. Go and talk to the refugees here, sir, and you will find that one of their chief causes of complaint is precisely that *they felt themselves deprived of everything*. Not only of their land, their businesses, their religion and their classics, but, above all, of all control over their own fate and their own future."

"It moved me," I interjected, "when the refugees here told me that the walls of their houses were no longer their own because instead of protecting them those walls had ears; and to such an extent that they no longer dared to exchange confidences with their nearest and dearest within their own four walls. And when they told me that the very stuff of which their clothes were made was no longer their own since they were not entitled to complain when it tore. And that their leisure time was no longer their own but for the loud-speaker. And that even their children were no longer their own since they were taught to spy on their parents at the order of their masters. And after that, sir, do you really still maintain that the dams are their own?"

"Unfortunately, I see that people who boast of their ability to expose official lies when they are uttered by capitalist officials are prepared to swallow even thumping lies when they are uttered by Communist officials. The capitalist bourgeoisie has invariably claimed that it works for the general good. But you and your friends never believed that. Why? Because you could see that the working people who produced the riches did not get a fair share of them, and that they had very little voice in the way affairs were run. But when the Communist leaders tell you that they are the do-gooders of tomorrow, you accept their word without doubting, although precisely they have drastically reduced that share and abolished that voice altogether. You

believe them simply because they lie more. All in all, Communist industrialisation is not bigger or better or more efficient than that carried out by other régimes, but it is certainly much more cruel; and, into the bargain, it is steeped in deceit and imposture. Communism organises total enslavement yet claims total liberation. That at least is a vice which does not attach to other régimes of exploitation: they do not claim to be 'socialist'. But Mao and Khrushchev are not content with oppressing the workers; they have also stolen their ideal and their socialist banner in order to trample it in the mud."

Mao's guest fidgeted in his chair; he had just thought of the dialectical volte-face to get him out of his tight corner, and he began:

"But when factories are built in the capitalist world I can clearly see the factory-owner or the shareholders, and I am therefore right in saying that the workers in that factory are not working for themselves but for the profit of the owner or owners. That is not the case in the Communist world. Where are the owners of the new dams in Mao's China, may I ask? And you, Dr. Tang, you've simply left out a fact of enormous significance: under a Communist régime the economy as a whole is *collectivised*. Admit at least that this weighty circumstance does suggest that the economy develops and operates in the interests of the community."

It was now for a change the turn of Mao's guest to triumph whilst Dr. Tang remained silent and searched his brains for a reply. As for me, I was once again struck by the hypnotic effect this phrase about "the collectivisation of the economy" exercises even on people without a Marxist background.

"Your whole dialectical construction trips up over one fact of enormous significance; namely, that the collectivisation you talk about is a sham," I replied.

"Perhaps you would explain just what you mean, Madame?"

"I certainly will. It is a sham for one fundamental reason: namely, that it is senseless to talk about the collectivisation of the factories when the community is in chains. It would really be letting legal formalism go to one's head to believe that property is transferred to a class simply because it is given the title on a piece of paper, even if that piece of paper should be dignified with the name of 'Constitution'. For a materialist, used to separating 'the wheat of things from the chaff of words', to quote Lenin, what really constitutes ownership and possession is the practical power to dispose over the things possessed.

Therefore, to say that the people are the owners of the productive apparatus doesn't mean a thing unless they also have the power to dispose over that apparatus, to decide how it shall be run, who shall run it, and what shall be done with the things it produces. But as the population is too large to exercise any such control except through its representatives, it follows that it owns the factories only to the extent that it controls the State; that is to say, to the extent to which it enjoys democratic liberties. Thus political democracy is the real title—and the only conceivable one—through which a whole people can own the economic apparatus. Could one even conceive of a grosser imposture than that which pretends that workers who do not even own themselves nevertheless own the factories? Certain Marxists who claim to possess superior perspicuity which makes them immune to 'reformist illusions' often say—in defiance of the facts—that 'political democracy without economic equality is nothing but a sham'. But they don't seem to notice that economic collectivism without political democracy is a much bigger sham; or to realise that, if in taking the factories the workers lose their liberty, then they immediately have lost the factories again. The two conceptions of a people gagged, and of a people owning the factories, are mutually incompatible."

"Tell me then," demanded Mao's guest, quite red in the face, "have the Communists abolished private property in the means of production, distribution and exchange, or not? They have, obviously. But then, according to you, they have not handed them over to the people, so what have they done with them? Where are the new proprietors hidden? If what the Chinese labourer is building up is not for him, and not for the millionaire either, for whom is it?"

"The answer to that is really very simple," put in Dr. Tang. "It's obviously for that *kanpou* before whom we have seen the Chinese labourer trembling. Or, if you prefer to have it in more sociological terms, it's for the bureaucrats of the Party and the State. They are the ones who exercise absolute control over the economic system, and who use that control in order to increase their own privileges and to perpetuate their own rule. *They* are the real owners of the Chinese economic apparatus. The only difference between them and the old capitalists in the days of private ownership is that their ownership is common; and that is why one may rightly call the régime they have established State capitalism."

"So not only do you degrade Communism to the level of State capitalism, but you also refuse to recognise any advantage in it over

capitalism and private ownership—not even with regard to organisational abilities. Don't you think you're exaggerating?"

"No," replied Dr. Tang firmly, "not at all. And certainly not if the State of the said capitalism is dictatorial. Particularly when we see that while dictatorship hinders State capitalism from improving its managerial methods, it allows it to intensify its mechanism of exploitation. A State which not only owns the economy but is also dictatorial, possesses means of mental and physical coercion which are much more to be feared than anything at the disposal of the old private owners, whose thirst for profits was at least, to some extent, limited by the activity of trade unions and the existence of political liberties. That is why a nationalised economy under a dictatorial State is much further removed from social justice than a private-ownership economy under a democratic State. For the first time in history the exclusive control of the economic apparatus *and* of the political apparatus is united in a totalitarian fashion in the hands of the same bureaucracy. This absolute power over all the instruments, allowing an absolute domination over men's bodies and men's minds, makes the ruling Communist class much more oppressive and much more bloodthirsty, and at the same time far less sensitive to the aspirations of the workers, than any form of modern liberal capitalism, *i.e.* a capitalism subject to reformist pressure and influence. For example, the trade unions, which defend the interests of working people under capitalism, have been debased to the level of auxiliary stooges in Communist China, and their role is to act as police in the factories. In other words, in Communist countries *the Communist Party is the federation of the bosses*. It is the first employers' federation which has successfully realised that old employers' dream: to control not only their own organisation but that of the workers as well."

"The Communist Djilas," I put in, "has rediscovered the evidence that the purpose of the Communist dictatorship is not, as those who excuse it pretend, to defend the conquests of the revolution, but to divert them into the hands of a new class of exploiters. All his experiences in Yugoslavia confirmed that law. And everything the outside world has seen through the great chinks in the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe and Asia has confirmed it too. The risings of the people in Eastern Germany, Poznan, Budapest and Tibet, and the mass flight of simple, ordinary people through all the various Iron Curtains, have written the truth about Communism in letters of fire across the skies of the free world: namely, that wherever Communism seizes power it

establishes a class régime in which an all-powerful and privileged bureaucracy oppresses and exploits the working people to a far greater extent than any other modern ruling class has ever done."

"That is a provisional phenomenon," declared Mao's guest, "for the simple reason that, whether we like it or not, industry irresistibly stimulates the emancipation of the people. In the long run it cannot help extending the education and the well-being, and thus the power, of the masses. You see, although it was solely interested in profits, not even capitalism based on private ownership was able to prevent that development. It was even compelled to encourage it to the extent that the emancipation of the poor created a bigger market. I repeat: the dictatorship will pass, Communism will remain."

"You forget one important point: namely, that rise of the people, thanks to the development and spread of industry, took place under private capitalism only to the extent that side by side with it there was another process, the spread of political democracy. But the specific aim of the Communist dictatorship is to hinder that development. Because it is master both of the factories and the schools, of the press and the trade unions, the Communist dictatorship can *industrialise without emancipating*. And fundamentally that, to use its own jargon, is its real 'historic role'. It consists in forcing society into such a rigid mould that even the multiplication of machines need not involve the emancipation of man. And this, let me stress, is essentially a counter-revolutionary role. If you had had eyes to see instead of theses to worship, that truth would have become clear to you, because it is written in letters of blood on those dams built by the modern serfs. It shows that by comparison with Communism any régime which allows liberty to flourish in or around its factories is progressive. Mao represents the ancestral absolutism which hopes to survive by harnessing science against freedom."

"But that's just it," retorted Mao's guest, "Chinese society has always lived under absolutism. You are making a monumental error in translating European scales of values to Asia. Freedom means absolutely nothing to a Chinese peasant who has never had any other choice to make than to decide when to harvest his rice, and who has lived for centuries in the tight-laced corset of custom. The only thing which interests him is getting enough food, and enough food is precisely what the Communist system offers him. The Western system, with its freedom which presupposes culture but does not fill bellies, is completely beside the point."

Dr. Tang flushed and began to cough indignantly. He was obviously outraged at what my fellow countryman was saying. However, when he spoke his voice was still gentle, though with an undercurrent of tension.

"What makes you think that in exchange for less political liberty the Communist régime gives the Chinese people more goods? The facts show that the exact contrary is the case. The Communist dictatorship does fill plates poorly and prisons lavishly. Go and ask the refugees here what they think, sir. You will find that, one and all, they will tell you that Communism lowered their standard of living. And today everyone recognises that this is also what happened in Soviet Russia from 1931 to 1950 during the industrialisation and the enforced collectivisation. Everywhere in the world, sir, you will find that the knout and black bread go together, just as the ballot-box and wheaten bread go together too."

"At least, Communism gives security of employment, and that is a great deal. Whether black, grey or white, the daily bread is no longer a matter of anxiety and doubt; and neither are sickness, employment and old age. And aren't they the things which the masses want even more than ease today?"

"Security? Did I really hear you say that Communism brought the workers security? The fact is that they never had less security than they have under Mao. One day the peasant is given a little patch of ground to work for himself; the next day it is taken away from him and he is herded into the People's Communes. One week a workman will find himself working in Canton; the next week he finds himself sent to Sinkiang. A teacher kisses his wife before he sets out in the morning; he's not at all sure that he'll see her when he comes home in the evening—or even that he will come home in the evening. Either he or she could suddenly be sent to work in the tin mines. And supposing the teacher succeeds in putting just a little by for a rainy day—the first 'anti' campaign that comes along will take it away again. One day people are simply begged to criticise the government. A month later they are flung into prison for having done so. And these tribulations are suffered by everyone, simple workman as well as higher official. It is perhaps the first time in history that secret police have not contented themselves with attending to the active heterodox, but penetrate into the homes of the poorest of the poor. Under Communism, poverty has not even the advantage of tranquillity. If you have neither ideas nor money you are just as likely to end up in prison

as if you had. In the nineteenth century in Europe the masses also led miserable and hazardous lives; what they chiefly needed was food and security. And yet what they demanded *first* was freedom, the right to vote, the right to express their opinions publicly, the right to strike. Experience confirmed the wisdom of this preferential order very soon after they won those rights—which gave them the opportunity of protesting clamorously and of exercising political pressure—their standards of life began to rise. In other words, the historic truth is the exact opposite of Communist sophistry. Political liberty is a luxury for the rich, but for the poor it is a vital necessity; it is the essential, the irreplaceable, instrument for securing their material well-being.”

“And that, sir,” put in Dr. Tang, “is just as true for the people of under-developed Asia. *The first thing they must do in order to emerge from their poverty is not to build rolling-mills but to eliminate absolutism.* And as for your contention that the need for liberty is not felt among the peoples of Asia, I regret to say that it puts you in very bad company: with the racialists who deny the universality of human aspirations—claiming at the same time, oddly enough, the highest for the white race—and the reactionaries who spent a century telling the world that the poor people of Europe did not really need political rights; all they wanted was bread—to which they added circuses. You, of course, add Marxism.”

I was rather shocked at this asperity from the usually so extremely courteous Dr. Tang, but he was obviously hurt at the suggestion that his fellow countrymen should be thought to have no interest in human liberty.

“The fact is, sir,” he went on, “all people, no matter what their race, value human liberty—even if they don’t lecture about it at the Sorbonne. It is quite true that the Chinese peasant does not interest himself a great deal in politics, contenting himself with obedience to the Emperor in the old days, and having to obey the partog much more today under Communism. But why should you assume from this that he attaches no importance to liberty? If he attached no importance to liberty, why did he applaud the revolution of 1911—before Communism was thought of? Why does he venerate the name of Sun Yat-sen, and to such an extent that the Communist Party, trampling on all Sun Yat-sen stood for, has to pretend to uphold his banner? The Chinese worker quickly turned to trade unionism, and now that he is unable to organise himself as he would like, he suffers from it. For centuries the Chinese peasant has demanded his patch of land and

obtained it, and now that under Communism he can no longer freely cultivate his patch of land, he suffers from it. As far as his personal life is concerned, he has always enjoyed very considerable freedom, even under the Emperors. He was always able to decide when to work and when not, and what he would do and what not. He was always at liberty to speak his mind to his fellows, and he was often very well able to do so too. That elementary human liberty of the arm and the tongue, the liberty to do as one pleases, to chat to one's neighbour after the day's work, to join in the business of the community, and to conduct one's family affairs according to one's own opinions, was always greatly valued by our ordinary people, and its roots are age-old. That kind of liberty existed in China before the liberty of the press did—and it was the advent of Communism which destroyed both.

"And you choose Hongkong of all places to express your doubt as to China's love for liberty! But there are two and a half million Chinese refugees here whose very presence demonstrates that they prefer the bitter bread of banishment to the loss of freedom. And do you know that during the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign, when people dared to speak, there were more complaints about oppression and the attacks on human dignity than there were even about the shortages and the exhausting labour norms? That is indisputable proof that liberty is natural to man, and that all men are the same in that respect no matter what the colour of their skins. In fact, it is those people in the West who sympathise with Communism who are losing sympathy with liberty, but, as in some confused way they are rather ashamed of it, they tend to project this indifference towards liberty on to the peoples of Asia."

"But all that is mere theorising," objected Mao's guest. "In actual fact the Communists win over the masses of Asia by promising them bread and not liberty."

"Not so!" said Dr. Tang. "They win them over, above all, by stoking up their resentment of the whites and by rousing their national pride; that is to say, through their *emotions* rather than their *needs*. Of course, they also talk about bread, but the West does that too; with much more reason, though with much less success. And then, even granted that the conquest of freedom may not be the main theme of the Communist adventure *beforehand*, it does not follow that the loss of freedom is not the main misfortune *afterwards*."

"You are overlooking the time factor, Dr. Tang," Mao's guest objected. "The exceptionally rigorous form of Communist industrial-

ism in the beginning is not, in all fairness, imputable to Communist principles. That rigour is due exclusively to what economists call the phase of primitive accumulation. Every régime which has no capital, and which must in consequence create its industrial basis by over-exploiting the only substitute there is for capital, namely, labour power, has to go through that stage of primitive accumulation. Don't forget that capitalism also passed through it at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in consequence there was a fourteen-hour day, women and children did night work, the proletariat was in rags and lived, half-starved, in slums. But in the end things settled down, as they did in the Soviet Union too, and the system became more human."

"There is some truth in what you say, sir, but under capitalism humanitarian people did not attempt to excuse the harshness of that primitive accumulation by saying that things would settle down later on. On the contrary, it was that very harshness which impelled those protests and brought about the rise of Socialism. Marx, for example (as he said himself), derived practically all his system from that over-exploitation which he witnessed and was horrified by, as were also, you will remember, Proudhon, Fourier and Owen. And they had every reason to be. Because at that time, for private capitalism just as for State capitalism in Mao's China today, it was clear that if this primitive accumulation aimed at improving the condition of the people it would not have started by reducing them to the state of pariahs. And in the nineteenth century every man of goodwill realised at once that the ferocious pace at which things were being rushed forward was due only to the greed and selfishness of the masters and not to a desire to improve the conditions of the workers. The fact that children were being forced to slave in inhuman conditions in the mines was regarded as sufficient proof that the mine was not being dug for those children but for the privileged owners. That common-sense reaction was in accord both with reality and with humanity; but, alas, it would seem that those who sympathise with Communism nowadays are capable neither of seeing the one nor feeling the other. Do you know what has happened to them? Simply that they have become insensitive to the exploitation and oppression of man by man. If it is done by means vaguely called 'functional', a term they can then juggle with dialectically, they see no exploitation or oppression. But this reveals that they have never really been moved to indignation by the exploitation of man by man, but merely by certain exploiters who happen to arouse their ire, namely, the bourgeoisie; that they have, in

fact, never been against exploitation as such, or unconditionally on the side of the exploited."

"I am somewhat at a disadvantage against you both," Mao's guest observed. "In conclusion, let me confine myself to one observation, not in order to defend myself, but for the sake of truth; it is that the harshness which causes your indignation where Communism is concerned does not result from its own villainy, but from the barbarous conditions which surround it. That harshness is, in fact, inevitable if one wishes to modernise a backward country in which ancient traditions and ancestral passivity undermine all attempts to introduce modern methods of labour and thus make a firm hand necessary."

"That is an argument," I replied, "which is used a good deal in Europe to excuse the brutalities of Communism, though those who use it apparently fail to see that it devolves from the ideology of the birch. But if Communism can be justified only as a lash for backward countries, how can it at the same time be presented as a model for advanced countries? It can't, of course, but nevertheless that is what it claims. It canvasses our approval as a desirable good everywhere, not as a necessary evil somewhere."

"And there is another thing," put in Dr. Tang; "the suggestion that the Communist dictatorship is the only way to shake certain backward people out of their apathy does not stand up to examination. For one thing that same dictatorship bears down on advanced Czechoslovakia as well as on backward China. And then, we have the striking example of Japan, which was translated from the Middle Ages to modern times at a record speed—and without the establishment of concentration camps. And then, after all, the picture of China as so stagnant that it has to be whipped into action is grossly over-simplified. I must point out to you, sir, that China was by no means as backward as all that. Let me remind you that it had three large modern industrial centres and certain far from negligible technical resources at its disposal. In addition, it had the advantage of one of the most industrious peoples in the world, willing, careful and rational—by which I mean without religious prejudices or mysticism—with a high degree of manual dexterity, and of lively mind and frugal habit. In other words, the Chinese people would have been pure gold for a sound and humanitarian industrialisation."

"That is certainly true," I exclaimed, recalling those industrious, intelligent and sober ants I had seen, "the Chinese represent marvellous labour power compared, for example, with certain more nonchalant

peoples of the Middle East and of Africa. With millions of willing arms and hands like that, and with lively tractable brains behind them, there was less need for a cruel dictatorship to force through industrialisation than anywhere else in the world. A really 'advanced' régime, that is to say, a régime which was both dynamic and humane, would easily have been able to get rid of the old outdated habits and customs without letting loose all hell, and without returning to even worse and more outdated habits and customs such as despotism and slavery."

"Yes," agreed Dr. Tang, "all that Communism has done in China in the last resort is to spread ancestral absolutism by trains and loud-speakers, whereas previously it was spread by caravans and the town crier. Truly, sir, of China and Communism the more backward of the two is not the one you think."

YELLOW PERIL OR RED?

DR. TANG's sally, in which, on reflection, there was profound truth, released a double train of approval and disapproval which progressively moved us all. Before long the discussion had become general and turned to deep matters, such as the future of modern China and the possibility of a clash between the imperialisms of Peking and Moscow; in short the fate of the whites in face of the yellow peril against its red background.

The diplomats who were present, as well informed about all things Chinese as one can be only in Hongkong, provided alarming details concerning the growth of Chinese imperialism: the troops massed on the frontiers of Nepal, Sikkim and Burma; the subjugation of Northern Korea and Vietnam; the intensive military preparations proceeding along the dividing lines of those partitioned countries; the infiltration into India, Japan, Cambodia, Laos and Indo-China, where elements in all social circles already receive the fiat of Peking; the intrigues of the diplomatic and trade missions three times as strong as those of democratic countries; the ceaseless manoeuvres to take over the overseas Chinese colonies throughout Asia; the economic dumping in Hongkong; the special schools maintained for the training of agitators to be sent to all parts of Asia; and, in consequence, the penetration into Madagascar, Guinea, Morocco and the stamping grounds of the F.L.N. in Algeria.

Others, in order to bring back to reason those who were already inclined to see slit-eyed commissars with high cheek-bones sitting in Westminster and the White House, stressed the manifest weaknesses of Communist China—all those which Dr. Tang had already indicated to me. And an expert pointed out that after ten years of intensive military expenditure the Chinese Army had given a miserable demonstration of its artillery inefficiency at Quemoy.

In the end I left, once again with Dr. Tang, for whom I had acquired a warm sympathy—so much so that the news of his subsequent

sudden death greatly saddened me. We went down to the port on foot, making our way through the Hongkong crowds and chatting over what we had heard.

"Now we are alone," I said, "and there is no danger of your hearing industrialisation counted to the glory of Communism, tell me your private opinion about the level it can reach during the next few years. We know that Communism is cruel and egoistic. We deny its humanity, but we do not deny its material virility. It is served by great numbers of industrious people and by a State power which is both ruthless and unscrupulous. Will it finish by making China a redoubtable nation?"

"It is, in fact, quite possible," he said cautiously, "that within the space of, say, twenty years, China will emerge with an industrial armature comparable to that of Japan."

"And as its population is six times as great, it won't be surprising if the general public has the impression of a giant rising in its strength," I suggested.

"True, true, but you must never forget that whatever happens two-thirds of the population will remain agricultural at the end of that twenty years. We might see a total industrial strength perhaps approximately three times that of present-day Japan, which means a fifth that of the United States. Let us assume that this means a colossus. Why should it scare the world, while the colossus of the U.S.A., five times bigger, leaves everybody quite safe? It does frighten people only because the Chinese régime is a totalitarian one, hence intolerant and aggressive, whereas the American Government is democratic, hence tolerant and peaceful. A China as strong, as prosperous, as modern as the U.S.A. would not involve any menace for the world, if that China were democratic.

"On the contrary, we could only be happy to see the Chinese people emancipated from poverty and backwardness.

"Look at Japan. It is, today, much more powerful than China, industrially, and it is as *yellow* as China. Nevertheless, it does not frighten anybody, since it has adopted a democratic way of life. What really must scare the world is not China's potential force of six hundred million people, but the fact that this force has become available to aggressive, intolerant and totalitarian Communist masters. This is why I maintain that there is no *yellow peril* but only a *red peril*. The danger lies not in China but in Communism."

"That, of course, is quite true. A China as strong, as modern, and as

prosperous as the United States would not occasion fear in the rest of the world if at the same time it were democratic and therefore peaceable. Let us hope that in those twenty years Communism will be overthrown; but at the same time let us not pretend that that consummation is anything but a hope; and remember instead that there is a very real possibility that Communism will actually last that long. In other words, although there is cause for disquiet, there is no cause for panic, since the threat gives us time to take precautionary measures—provided we retain the will to defend ourselves. But what are the measures we can actually take?”

“The idea we hear most about,” Dr. Tang replied, “is to separate China from the Soviet Union, and I have seen people competing as to who could report the most circumstantial account of disputes between Mao and Khrushchev, although they always talked together in the utmost secrecy. There are certain newspapers in the West which cannot report a Sino-Soviet meeting without adding, almost as a matter of course, that ‘Moscow has resigned itself to listening to the voice of Peking’. Whole diplomatic edifices have been based on the alleged discords between Moscow and Peking though no one seems to have taken the trouble to discover whether they correspond to reality.”

“They certainly seem to correspond to the strings Moscow and Peking pull between them, because I have noticed that the most zealous propagators of these tales about ‘Sino-Soviet discord’ are their own agents.”

“Very true,” agreed Dr. Tang. “And in doing that they are following the maxims of our old military theorist, Sun Tse, who, in the sixth century B.C., counselled an expansionist prince to lull the vigilance of those nations whose possessions he coveted by spreading rumours to the effect that everything in his own camp was at sixes and sevens.”

“All the same, isn’t it true that the vast empty spaces of Siberia do exercise a certain fascination on over-populated China?”

“I don’t think so. The natural trend of Chinese expansion is not towards the north, where climate and Russians would make yellow settlements risky; it points southwards, to Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Borneo, New Guinea, even Australia. There you have relatively unpopulated regions—by Chinese standards—with a climate and, with the exception of Australia, a similar social background; areas relatively unimportant to the big brother of Moscow; areas where the Chinese has always appeared as the superior being and areas where it would be

so easy to catch the Americans napping one day. That is the line on which both Moscow and Peking have a clear interest to push together."

"But isn't it true all the same that the Soviet Government does cast a colonialist eye on the Chinese province of Sinkiang?"

"Only for military establishments, which are welcomed by Mao. And anyway that province, as large as the whole of Europe, is wide and empty enough to allow some sharing. Therefore, for the time being, it is likely that Mao's China and the Soviet Union will be able to settle any such little discordances between them. Don't forget their solidarity on vital issues. China has given full support to the Soviet Union against the rebellious oppressed peoples in East Berlin, Poznan and Budapest. And in return the Soviet Union has let the world know that when Communist China attacks Quemoy any retaliatory action against Peking will be regarded as an act of war against the Soviet Union. And where the Arab world is concerned Moscow and Peking harmoniously share all penetrations and protections. For example, at the time of the Suez crisis, they acted as though they were joined together like Siamese twins. Hardly a cloud passed over the Moscow-Cairo relationship but it began to rain on the relationship between Peking and Cairo.

"Perhaps you will say that Mao shouted louder against Tito than Khrushchev did? That's true, but he only shouted when Khrushchev growled. Mao did not throw as many stones at Stalin as Khrushchev did, either. But those he threw were only thrown the day Khrushchev uncovered the target. As you see, the only noticeable thing about all their *major* acts so far is their astonishing concordance. Political commentators don't seem to attach much importance to that, whereas they point to the apparent divergences as though they were axiomatic, though no one has ever seen any real evidence of it. Rarely have political speculations combined so much arbitrariness with so much assurance."

"But surely there are certain dissonances between the two governments."

"Yes, but only on minor issues. And the fact that in all questions basic to their survival both régimes always agree, helps us to understand that their disagreements on tactical questions simply stem from a division of labour by which Russia and China take turns in throwing the ball. For example, where the one makes an aggressive move, the other comes forward to play the role of mediator, and so calm the free world's fears. It is, I think, what is called in American slang 'working

both sides of the street'. Please remember, Madame, that until comparatively recently the Soviet Union alone staged the international moves on behalf of the whole Communist world, and thus the Soviet Union itself had to alternate the tough and the soft lines according to the reactions of the West. But in recent years Communist China has come on to the international scene as a partner, and the two of them working together can now follow these disparate policies *simultaneously*—the one from Moscow, the other from Peking. This gives the Communist powers a great advantage and increases the disarray of the West."

Dr. Tang's words came back to me at the time of the border clashes between China and India, and they threw a great light on the whole situation: China urgently requires a strip of territory on the other side of the Himalayas where she can erect an impenetrable iron curtain to prevent the Tibetans from fleeing her tyranny. Moreover, the Chinese are anxious to get to the southern slopes of the Himalayan passes so that they can dominate defenceless India and blackmail her into surrender—perhaps without firing a shot! *That* is why China invaded Tibet and encroached upon Indian territory.

Unfortunately for the Communists, however, this aggression on the part of Communist China discredits the Indian Communist Party, which, until quite recently, was growing stronger. But in such a situation there is an ingenious solution: Khrushchev can come forward and play the role of the benevolent father figure, shocked and embarrassed at the outrageous and wilful behaviour of the bad boy Mao, thus giving the Indian Communist Party a chance to extricate itself from the toils of Communist China's unpopularity and bask instead in the refulgence of Khrushchev's role as the supposed protector of India's interests.

But that is not the only benefit the two conspirators can derive from adopting apparently opposing policies. For example, China could deliberately push her aggressiveness further than she otherwise would, in order to bring about a really "hot" crisis. This would be the cue for good old Daddy Khrushchev to step in, pour oil on troubled waters, and walk off with the garlands of the "Peacemaker". Now this would really be something worth while, because up to the present there has been one very weak point in his role as peace lover: namely, that he has never engaged himself beyond words. He has never actually done one single thing. The Russian borders have not been opened to printed or broadcast matter from the West; there has been no renunciation of the subversive activities carried on in the free countries of the

West by the various Communist and Communist-sponsored organisations; the Hungarian people have not been liberated; and no real disarmament control has been accepted.

Now apparently to halt Chinese aggression might be sufficient of an "action" to convince the free world that the Soviet Union really does sincerely desire peace. Yet such an "action" would cost the Soviet Union nothing at all. For example, it would not have to disgorge any of the booty it brutally pocketed during former periods of Soviet aggression. And not only that, but Khrushchev would naturally demand concessions from the free world as the price of his intervention to avoid war—the threat of which he and Mao would previously have launched in collusion! Starting a conflagration in order to get paid for putting it out is an old Bolshevik trick.

But let me go back to my discussion with Dr. Tang in the middle of the crowded streets of Hongkong.

"The problem we are discussing," I said, "is so important that in order not to miss the slightest possibility I am going to turn myself into the Devil's advocate. Let us admit for the moment that the plan to drive a wedge between Mao's China and the Soviet Union is not based on any existing facts. Is it therefore on that account completely Utopian? If we carefully cultivate the germs of an estrangement isn't it just possible that we can encourage rivalry between two powers which are equally ruthless and self-seeking? And to be even more practical: what do you think about the suggestion, now somewhat neglected but once heavily canvassed in Western circles, of winning China over to our camp?"

Dr. Tang replied with bitter irony: "For a long time one was considered an anti-Communist blinded by prejudices if one failed to see that Chinese Communism had immolated many millions of innocents merely in order to don the mask of the wolf, but that, behind the mask, was a lamb which was only awaiting the arrival of the Western Ambassadors to show how peaceable it really was. For a long time one was treated as a blind and awkward sort of person if one failed to recognise that poor Mao had inadvertently fallen into the Soviet toils, and that because of his ancient Chinese culture he was now suffering agonies and already turning imploring eyes to the West in the hope of deliverance."

"That picture of the captive angel in the hands of the Devil is obviously absurd on the psychological plane, but what about the material plane? A number of refugees here have assured me that the

industrial colonisation of China by the Kremlin has already gone very far. Is that so?"

"Judge for yourself: the Soviet Government has financed and directed 260 out of the 300 great projects contained in the Five-Year Plan. It has loaned China something like a thousand million pounds, and sent at least 100,000 technicians, engineers, advisers and so on to work in these Chinese undertakings. Most of the modern factories and industrial undertakings which Peking so proudly shows to visitors from abroad, such as the automobile works in Changchun, the industrial combination in Anshan, and the atomic centre in Sinkiang, are Soviet from beginning to end, and they are administered by mixed Sino-Soviet companies. In all Chinese ministries there is a High Commission of 'education and control' which is made up of the Soviet 'counsellors', and all these commissions are supervised by a special 'committee for scientific and technological co-operation' which is attached to the Chinese Government. These experts, educators and supervisors from the Soviet Union are everywhere—in the factories, laboratories, studios, editorial offices, barracks, and in the security organisations. Generally speaking Moscow sends Tartars, Buryats, Turkmenians and other Mongolian peoples to serve in the security organisations, because their skin is also yellow, their eyes slanted and their cheekbones high, and so they pass unnoticed amongst the Hans. Education is carried on at all stages according to textbooks translated from the Russian. Every year 4,000 Chinese students, who have been very thoroughly screened indeed, leave for Moscow to continue their education and training there. A revealing indication of the supervision exercised by Moscow over China can be seen from the fact that it was from the *Pravda* on November 1, 1952, that the world learned of the first Chinese Five-Year Plan. It was not until December 24, 1952, fifty-three days later, that Chou En-lai informed the Chinese people of that crucial piece of news. Incidentally, the Chinese people were not deceived. In the old days they called the Colonialists 'the long noses', but now they call them 'Sulen-Yen', which means Soviet Men.

"In addition, the advisers sent from Moscow have taken good care to develop those sectors which particularly favour Soviet penetration, such as the famous Siberian railways to Northern China and the installations of the northern belt: the steelworks at Anshan, the oil-fields at Peatov and the mines of Langchow in the neighbourhood of Russian territory. And over and above that they have so arranged matters that Chinese industry is made subordinate to their own in key

matters, such as non-ferrous metals, the supply of which remains a jealously guarded Soviet monopoly. Then, of course, there is the financial side of this support: the necessary roubles are not given, but only lent, and at high rates of interest ranging from four to six per cent., and for relatively short terms, ranging from five to ten years. To obtain machinery sold by the Soviets at high prices China has to sell foodstuffs and raw materials, both of which her own people urgently need, at very low prices."

"In other words, we are faced with a typical colonialist cycle: the spoliation of the native resources of an under-developed country in exchange for machinery at excessively high prices, and infiltration with experts?" I put in.

"Do you think, after all, that Lucien Bodard was exaggerating when he said that China was indissolubly attached to the Kremlin? And, note in particular [Dr. Tang stopped in his stride in order to stress this point], China attached to the Kremlin, not the Kremlin to China. In fact, the most obvious thing in that dependence is its unilateralism. China is crawling with Soviet advisers, but there are not any Chinese advisers in the Soviet Union. Russian is taught compulsorily in Chinese schools, but Chinese is not taught at all in Russian schools. Pictures of Soviet leaders are stuck up everywhere in China, but there are no pictures of Chinese leaders in the Soviet Union. Moscow and Peking are synchronised in the sense that Moscow calls the tune and Peking dances."

"So you think that there is no cleavage between China and the Soviet Union?"

"Let us get the point quite clear: I don't think there will be any cleavage *in the foreseeable future*. Within the next hundred years, of course, anything is possible. But when did any practical policy base itself on the caprices of fate rather than on available records? It is not dishonest to extrapolate, but it is dishonest to do so inside the framework provided by existing data. One day Great Britain *may* become a republic; that is not entirely unlikely; but you wouldn't expect the Quai d'Orsay to base its foreign policy on that possibility, would you?"

"Note also, Dr. Tang, that now Chinese Communism has proved itself even more harsh and brutal than its Soviet predecessor, those who for years speculated on its supposed greater humanity and gentleness have now shamelessly executed a volte-face without even the slightest sign of embarrassment, though the facts have administered a simply

devastating rebuttal to their policy. They are now busily basing new speculations on exactly the contrary assumption: Communist China represents intransigence; Communist Russia represents conciliation. We are now invited to win the Soviet Union over to our side against Communist China. And to crown it all, we are being told that it is Chinese imperialism which threatens the poor Soviet Union."

"Yes, and the modern theory that the white people must form a united front against the yellow peril is about to do as much damage as did its predecessor. But it won't stand up to closer examination any the better. First of all, the Soviet Union, the chief artisan of that power which is now supposed to be fatal to it, knows that power's limitations too well to let itself be bluffed as is the West.¹ And in any case, should there be any boomerang effect from the industries it has itself installed in China—not a very great danger incidentally—it has a counter far more effective than the proposed alliance of white peoples, a counter far more in accord with its own nature, and far more favourable to its own designs: namely, the internal domestication of the Chinese power. We know already that the Bolsheviks are past masters at the art of infiltration; to such an extent, in fact, that they count primarily on that weapon to bring about the subjugation of their enemies. Why should they not prefer such a weapon in order to subjugate their friends? Particularly as they are already on the spot. Most of the high officials in Peking are their own men, old friends bound to them by golden, if bloody, chains.² Why therefore should the Soviet Union desire the good offices of the Western democracies, countries which are strong at the moment and which it would like to see weak, against a friendly régime which is weak at the moment and which will not be strong enough to represent a threat to it within the next fifty years, particularly as the Soviet Union already controls all the high and low offices in it?"

"Do you think that the parable of the sorcerer's apprentice is at all applicable?"

"No, I don't. The Bolsheviks may be sorcerers, but they are not, unfortunately, apprentices. Their speciality is the ability to control the

¹ In December 1959, the same month in which the theory of the Soviet threatened by China received official recognition in the West, the Soviets injected a massive new dose of economic help into China and called upon Chinese man-power in Outer Mongolia.

² A few months after Dr. Tang had said these shrewd words, confirmation was received of the nomination of Liu Shao-ch'i, a creature of the Kremlin, to the post of President of the Chinese Republic.

forces they let loose. All in all, the obvious policy of the Kremlin in the foreseeable future is to support its Chinese vassal and to use it in its plans to conquer the world; and first of all to conquer Europe and Asia, an objective which still remains its chief preoccupation. And the carrying out of that aim is all the more important because, if one day in the far distant future its Oriental flank should break away, it will be in a far better position to deal with the situation if it has already successfully subjugated its Western flank."

"I must confess," I admitted, "that at the moment there is really no ponderable factor to foreshadow that possibility of the far-distant future. However, there is just one thing which does suggest its possibility: that irresistible magnetism of power which affects all groups which have once tasted it, and makes them want more and more. It might therefore be neither territorial aspirations nor demographic pressure which finally set the two Communist powers by the ears, but merely their ambitions."

"In that case," said Dr. Tang, "the best policy is not to try to woo one at the expense of the other, but to leave them to stew in their own juice. It's a vulgar example perhaps, but to the point: we should not forget the common misadventure of the chivalrous neighbour who goes to the assistance of the wife beaten by her husband; only to find them immediately united in beating the interloper. Any advances on the part of the West to Peking against Moscow, or to Moscow against Peking, are more likely to bring the two even more closely together. And if we are to count on the insatiability of their appetites, then obviously the best thing to do is to satisfy the aspirations of neither and leave them both in isolation surrounded by a hostile world. That is always the best way to encourage dissension among gangsters."

"With that, Dr. Tang, you join me in my opposition to those oversubtle people in the West who think that we should recognise the Peking Government because the presence of our representatives there would have a civilising effect. I invariably ask them how they suppose that a handful of diplomats, closely supervised, rigorously confined to a chain of bars, and able to speak only to a corps of specially trained and indoctrinated interlocutors, could influence a totalitarian monolith which remains quite unmoved by the spectacle of the mass distress of its own people."

"Yes," agreed Dr. Tang, "it's quite a joke. And, incidentally, we have already had quite a good deal of experience with the Soviet Union in that respect. Between 1924 and 1928 the Soviet Union was

recognised by practically all the Western powers, but no such consummation took place. Communist régimes are essentially impenetrable, even from the supposed vantage point of embassies. The only penetration that does take place is that of the embassies by Communism. You could quote dozens of cases where diplomats sent to Moscow have wrenched the policy of their countries in a sense favourable to Moscow. But if you look on the other side of the picture, then you find that after twenty-five years' 'Presence' by fifty free countries in Moscow there is not one single act on the part of Moscow which that 'Presence' has favourably affected. The only known case of internal rupture in the Soviet block, that of Tito, came about for reasons which had nothing whatever to do with diplomacy."

"Yes, the fact is that diplomatic recognition would only increase the pretensions of the Chinese Communist Government while at the same time deepening the despair of the Chinese people, because it would seem to give an official endorsement to the tyranny from which they suffer. In other words, diplomatic recognition of Communist China would undermine the one real basis we have inside the Communist countries; namely, the hatred the common people feel for their oppressors. But our over-subtle at home reply—abandoning politics for commerce—that at least diplomatic recognition would open up new markets for us. What do you think of that suggestion, Dr. Tang?"

The question brought a curl of disdain to his lips as he said: "Do you really want me to tell you quite frankly what I think? Very well: before the embargo, the trade of China with the whole of the free world was only about one-fifth that of Switzerland. Each of the big countries of the West did only an infinitesimal part of its total foreign trade with China. Now the foreign trade between China and the other Communist countries is six times as great—not by any means large even so, since the whole of it amounts to not more than two and a half times the foreign trade of a small European country like Denmark. In other words, the current, such as it is, is flowing towards the Soviet Union, and the West has not the slightest hope of altering that, because the greater part of the trade is based on intangible exchanges and China is closely attached to the Kremlin by all the fibres of its economic infrastructure. In any case, should a few crumbs fall here and there, Japan will be on them like a flash, and Japan is in a position to sell at prices far below those of Europe. First of all, therefore, Communist China is practically a worthless market for the West and is likely to remain so. And if nevertheless it should provide an

honest penny for one or two fortunate traders, this really need not imply diplomatic recognition. For example, Western Germany is steadily increasing her trade with Communist China without finding it necessary to recognise her diplomatically. On the other hand, if you visit the Chamber of Commerce here in Hongkong, whose government has granted Mao diplomatic recognition, you will hear nothing but lamentations at the stagnation of trade, at the chicanery of the Communist authorities, at the pin-pricks suffered by British firms in China, at the discrimination against British goods, at the obligation to accept Chinese goods without previous examination, though the Chinese do nothing of the sort where British goods are concerned, and so on. And remember that in according diplomatic recognition the British hoped to get on to the Chinese market first!"

"And when I think how that miserable carrot is being dangled before our eyes by Mao's friends in Europe!"

"And as a Chinese sensible to the fate of my fellow countrymen, let me point out something else: Peking has no reserves of foreign currency with which it could pay for its imports from the West. All it can offer in exchange are its own exports, and they consist primarily of foodstuffs and textiles. Thus increased trade with the West must mean that the Chinese people, already exhausted by overwork and undernourishment, must eat even less rice, drink even less tea, and use even less cotton than before, whilst working even harder to produce such goods for export. In other words, the minor benefits which might possibly accrue to a few Western industrialists and merchants, already rich enough, would be based on the increased exploitation and poverty of a people already groaning under the yoke. You will hardly think that worth while, I am sure. And any benefits which would accrue to the other party to the deals, *i.e.* the Peking Government, would merely serve to strengthen its yoke. In fact one can say without exaggeration that on both sides the business would be carried out on the bent backs of the Chinese people."

I was impressed by this point of view, which struck me as both wise and humane, and which is, of course, completely ignored by our so-called *avant-garde* in the West. And it showed me how wide of the mark certain of those *avant-garde* intellectuals are when, instead of realising that anything which favours the Communist power injures the Chinese people, they demand the diplomatic recognition of Peking, in the name of the legitimacy of that power! In fact for a good democrat no power can be regarded as legitimate which has

not been confirmed by the people concerned in free elections. Just because such elections have never taken place in China, Mao's power there, though real, is no more legitimate than that of Khrushchev in Russia. I found it depressing to think that so many democrats in the West had abandoned their principles to such an extent as to forget that all and any dictatorships are by definition non-legitimate powers, and that a Chinese intellectual had to give them lessons on the point.

"Quite apart from all this," Dr. Tang went on, having remained silent for a while to respect my reverie, "trade with Communist China has certain aspects for free countries which threaten one fine day to turn against their interests. For one thing, whatever profit they may make out of such trading will have been gained at the cost of strengthening their worst enemy. Such money would have something of the odium which attaches to the profits of armament-makers, who sell their goods to all and sundry, and whose bombs often fall on to the heads of their fellow citizens when the time comes. If I am not mistaken your Liberal Left severely condemned that sort of trading, though it was certainly very profitable. In that case it provided arms and ammunition to Mussolini's Italy, which was guilty, amongst other things, of aggression against Abyssinia, whereas today it is a question of Mao's China, which has already been guilty of aggression in Korea. I can quite imagine that this kind of argument would not appeal very much to certain business men, but it ought not to leave a patriotic Liberal indifferent.

"But, finally, there is another aspect which, though little realised, would make trade with Peking verge on treason. And this is that for Communists everything, the economy, culture, sport, is carried on with the sole purpose of securing political domination. If Peking seeks so insistently to open up trade relations with the democracies, it is less in order to enrich itself than to undermine them. It is because in this way they provide it with a supplementary means of penetration and subversion. No sooner does a Chinese commercial mission descend on the capital of a free country—at about the rate of one official for every ten yards of silk imported—than hundreds of 'propagandist salesmen' are haunting the cafés, the drawing-rooms and those circles of intrigue and sophistry where trade counts for one and politics for ninety-nine out of a hundred; circles where zealous agents of Communist China work side by side with those of Soviet Russia. They are even more dangerous where there are Chinese minorities, since

they stir them up to revolt and intrigue against the countries which have given them hospitality.

"Further, the diplomatic recognition of the Chinese Communist Government would very soon mean the abandonment of Formosa; that is to say, the handing over of ten million anti-Communists to the tender mercies of the Communist butchers. Since when have such ignominious actions found approval in the civilised countries of the West?"

"My dear friend," I said sympathetically, "don't you know that morality has nothing to do with politics, and certainly not as between nations? It is not in the least unusual to see decent people approving of a boastful, egoistic and cynical attitude on the part of their country, where they would strongly condemn an individual who adopted the same attitude."

"But if there were ever a dispute which was entitled to be called 'ideological' it is that which separates the free world from totalitarian Communism, because what is at stake is not territory but a type of civilisation, a way of life. Now in such a struggle morality is not a mere flourish, it is the heart and sinews of the struggle itself. Incidentally, the Western so-called 'progressive' intellectuals do not abandon morality for realism except when they are dealing with the red Fascists. When they have to do with people like Hitler or Franco, they invoke essentially moral imperatives."

"That is true," I agreed. "For example, in France, M. Daniel Mayer, who recommends the diplomatic recognition of the butcher Mao as a matter of 'political realism', simply and solely because he has managed to maintain his power for ten years, has at the same time won himself some reputation as a man who leads an ardent campaign against the recognition of 'the butcher of Badajoz', Franco, although Franco has managed to stay in power twice as long as Mao. And in the name of this same 'realism' M. Edgar Faure declares that we cannot 'ignore the existence of a thousand million Communists', whereas in reality there are not a thousand million Communists at all, but just a thousand million men and women who live against their will and suffer under Communist régimes. And the best way we can show them that we do not ignore their existence is to show their oppressors the cold shoulder."

"Even from the standpoint of political realism the diplomatic recognition of Mao and the admission of Communist China into the United Nations Organisation can hardly be recommended," observed

Dr. Tang. "It would mean replacing Nationalist China at the council table by Communist China; replacing someone who supports the West with someone who opposes the West; one more enemy. And what an enemy! One that would automatically vote 'no' to all your projects, and equally automatically vote 'yes' whenever that increased your difficulties. And that doesn't even take the inhabitants of Formosa into consideration. Their courage and their self-sacrifice in the anti-Communist struggle cannot but be approved by all free men as a valuable adjunct to their own struggle—no matter what you may think of the Formosa régime. At the same time the fifteen million Chinese who live outside China would be let down too. And all the still-free governments of Asia would be thrown into confusion and intimidated by the diplomatic triumph of the Peking mastodon, and their resistance to it would disintegrate accordingly."

"There is, however, one difficulty," I pointed out. "If the dictators are non-legitimate powers in the eyes of the democracies, then why did they recognise the Soviet Union and allow it to become a member of the United Nations Organisation?"

"The Soviet Union was recognised at a time when the totalitarian nature of Communism was not entirely realised, and precisely in the hope of preventing such a development. Now that we can see that that hope has been disappointed by the facts, despite—or perhaps because of—the amiabilities shown towards Soviet Communism, and that the Russian bear has never ceased to sharpen its claws, it is too late to reverse that decision because the diplomatic representatives of the Soviet Union are already installed in the United Nations Organisation and in all the capitals of the free world. But in the whole experience from beginning to end I can see nothing to encourage us to repeat it with totalitarian China. To recognise Communist China would not be 'political realism' for the democracies—except in the spirit of the British humorist who declared that a policy was called 'realistic' when it repeated the follies which were the realities of yesterday. Or in the even worse sense that the word is used to cloak the abandonment of a principle and the acceptance of a defeat under a pretence of profound strategy. But in that case one could hardly claim that the democracies were recognising Communism in order to influence it, since the recognition would be due rather to the influence exercised by Communism on the democracies."

"The only valid interpretation of political realism is that which counsels us to take measures to defend our lives and not to sacrifice

ourselves to prejudices. In other words, everything goes back to the central question: will the West at last stop playing Hamlet, and decide 'to be'?"

"In more prosaic language, that merely means: do we or do we not intend to combat Communism?" said Dr. Tang. "The enemy's aim is perfectly clear and simple. He is out to destroy our political system. If our objective is not to frustrate the achievement of his objective, then let us say so and give up the struggle right away. If, on the other hand, we realise that our aim is to secure the disappearance of the Communist system, then everything becomes clear, and, in particular, the choice between a policy of firmness and a policy of appeasement."

"As a matter of fact the latter policy is often recommended as the best way to arrive at that supreme objective, the elimination of red totalitarianism. We are told that the easing of tension to be observed in the Soviet system is accelerated by our amiabilities and hampered by our snubs."

"And yet past experience shows exactly the opposite. The Soviet leaders have never shown the slightest inclination to compromise except when they felt that the West was taking a stronger line; and, on the other hand, they have invariably stiffened their own attitude when they felt that the West was weakening. There are innumerable examples to prove this point, and not one to indicate the contrary. And the reason why Khrushchev and Mao understand nothing but firmness is quite simple: they are dictators."

"In other words: 'Tender handed stroke the nettle, and it stings you for your pains; but grasp it like a man of metal, and it soft as silk remains.'"

"I'm afraid that was the fundamental lesson of both Munich and Yalta," said Dr. Tang. "The Berlin air-lift was an example of the former tactic, whereas Korea was an example of the latter. The day the Bolsheviks find no one in the West prepared to accept their sophisms; the day those people, who are primarily agitators and owe their assurance to the echo they awaken, feel themselves completely isolated and the target of general contempt, that day will see their arrogance crumble and their lust for expansionism cool. They will remove their hand from our countries when nobody in our countries cares to shake it. As their aim is to subjugate not so much our territories as our consciences, our firmness will show them that they have no chance of success, whereas a policy of appeasement would persuade them that they could succeed."

"Many of the supporters of a policy of appeasement certainly do create that impression, but it is only half true. True enough to allow the enemy to drive into the breach, but not enough to prevent their finally rallying against a physical invasion. By that time they will perhaps try to resist, but it will then be too late to resist except by arms. That is why Mr. Bevan's appeasement towards Moscow, though it does not go to the extent of complete surrender, makes for ultimate war far more than the intransigence of Mr. Dulles even did. When did you ever see a fire extinguished by throwing faggots into it? The only way to deal with a conflagration has been well known from the days of antiquity: you clear a sufficient space around it. Despite the fact that Communism has consumed millions of men already, Mr. Bevan unfortunately still does not realise that it is a conflagration."

"If you will excuse my little joke," said Dr. Tang, "it is not so much the under-developed countries of Asia that compromise peace as the under-developed minds of the West. When such people imagine that Western firmness would hold up the thaw in the East by rallying the peoples behind their Communist leaders, they commit the enormous error of treating the Soviet Union and Communist China as though they were ordinary countries, whose peoples would certainly resent it if the governments of their choice were snubbed. Once again they ignore the crucial phenomenon of totalitarianism. A cursory visit to any refugee camp here in Hongkong, or in Berlin, is sufficient to show that the best way to win the sympathy of the Russian and Chinese peoples is to show them that we detest their Communist leaders."

"What you say there, Dr. Tang, takes us back to a remark you made at the beginning. Is the peril which faces the West due to the existence of six hundred million Chinese or to the existence of the Communist dictatorship? Is the peril really red—or yellow?"

"You see, these jugglings with two contrary policies: with Mao's China yesterday against the Soviet Union, and with the Soviet Union tomorrow against Mao's China, really mean that we shall never be with liberty and against Communism. Some people propose to dissociate Peking from Moscow, and vice versa, in order in the end to fight against neither the one nor the other. It is one way of avoiding the stand which history demands of us: for or against absolutism. Thus to talk about the solidarity of white races in order to secure a rapprochement with Russia against China is nonsensical. It shows that its supporters have failed to recognise the essential fact; namely, that *Communism*

is primarily a system of power whose urge to expansionism takes no heed of race or nationality. To appeal to 'White' Russia against 'Yellow' China would be very much like the zebra which, finding itself threatened by a lion and a tiger, appealed to the tiger to recognise their common stripes. The greatest source of strength for Communism where the West is concerned is that the West simply does not want to see Communism."

"I'm afraid you are right; and the desperate attempts to find some important differences between the various incarnations of Communism is merely a panic-stricken flight away from their common essence. Robert Guillain has already warned us very clearly: 'There is no Chinese Communism; there is only Communism installed in China. It is the same Communism there as everywhere else. And anyone who believes that there is anything specifically Chinese about it is letting himself be deceived by clever propaganda.' And also, I must add, by the fear which makes so many people disguise the truth in order to be able to ignore the threat it contains; for example, the people who obstinately persist in looking for traces of Confucius in Mao, whereas in reality the similarity is patently to Stalin. I have not, Dr. Tang, taken the analysis as far as you have in the economic sphere, but in the political sphere I have been struck for a long time by the fact that, whereas many people embroider the supposed but quite invisible differences between the Soviet Union and Communist China, it is their close resemblance which is so extraordinary. Never in history was there such great similarity between two countries of two such different civilisations as there is today between Soviet Russia and Communist China. In fact, I was so struck that I have made a list of the important characteristics in which Moscow and Peking are alike. Just listen to it:

'One Party with one policy and one head; rump congresses always unanimous about everything put before them.

Brain-washing, concentration camps, false confessions extracted by torture, compulsory delation.

Domestic passports to hamper free movement within; an Iron Curtain to prevent egress and exit.

Prohibition of the right to strike; phoney trade unions which are stooge organisations to ensure labour discipline, encourage Stakhanovism and increase working hours.

Forced loans, forced labour, forced employment, forced collectivisation.

Militarism, chauvinism, imperialism.

Pompous planification coupled with chronic anarchy and an all-consuming bureaucracy which represents a new social class.

Cultural regimentation, stifling censorship, fantastic propaganda.' ”

“You have hit the nail on the head even harder than you think, Madame, because that list merely evokes the *macroscopic* characteristics of the two régimes. But their similarity is continued into the smallest details, of style, of rhythm. Let me list them: the same indigestible pabulum in the newspapers; the same pseudo-Marxist hotchpotch; the same Leninist courses; the same sickening adulation of their leaders; the same phases of agricultural collectivisation: deportations, wild boastings, retreat, return to land parcelment, renewed denunciation of the new kulaks, re-collectivisation, re-deportations—and so on and so on. The same tablets of honour or shame in the factories, the same uniform dullness in dress; the same wretched mediocrity and conformism in art; the same crushing dictatorship in literature; the same idolatry of the Communist Party. The same pretence of elections with prefabricated results—99·6 per cent. of all votes in favour of the Communist chiefs! The same ‘self-criticism’ farce; the same fabricated enthusiasm for the same unpopular measures; the same widespread use of fraud and trickery, going even as far as the re-writing of history and the invention of happenings which did not take place at all—such as, for example, the giant bacteriological swindle in order to be able to accuse the Americans.”

Dr. Tang's words reminded me of former Communist Ku's bitter words on the nature of the Chinese Communist revolution as an imitation of the Russian Revolution: “A servile imitation of the Russian Revolution,” he had said. “A mere tracing of the original.” But Dr. Tang was continuing his description of the tracing:

“The rites of the so-called New China are exactly the same as those of Soviet Russia. For example the great parades on the Red Square in Peking are the twin brothers of those on the Red Square in Moscow. There are the same flags, the same posters, the same cartoons, the same serried ranks of young people in uniform. Of course, there are a few differences between China and the Soviet Union, but the differences are purely superficial; something like different clothes on the same body, different incidents on the same path that leads to slavery. There are no differences in the general direction. It is the structure of the

regimé, and not its outer appearance, which counts where the fate of the masses and the destiny of the world are concerned. It is the knout which matters and not the cap worn by the man who wields it. In short, there are no more differences in Communism than there are in death. The body which dies and the manner in which it dies may be different, but, for all the phenomena, death is the same; and the state of all those bodies when death has supervened is the same."

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I watched the small, decent and dignified figure of Dr. Tang as he went away, and there was a warmth in my heart. I was to meet him once again, in Paris, where he brought me greetings from the friends I had made in the camps, and also further evidence from more recent fugitives, whose accounts he had collected on my behalf and set down with great care. A few months after his return to Hongkong I heard with great sadness that the disease from which he suffered had proved fatal.

In one afternoon, first of all during our discussion with the guest of Mao, and then afterwards as we walked together through the swarming crowds of Hongkong, the little man with his gentle voice, his restrained gestures, his shy smile, and those many professorial wrinkles, had acquired the stature of a whole series of symbols for me—a symbol of the human mind triumphing over the twin demons of logomachy and schematism—a symbol of the weak speaking its mind to the strong—a symbol of the human primate triumphing over the national primate—for he had never canvassed sympathy for the suffering of his country except in the larger framework of universal suffering. I was delighted that he had given my intellectual fellow countryman, who had been Mao's guest and who was typical of Western "progressive" intellectuals, that essential lesson that real human progress comes from a constant respect for men and not from the pretentious hocus-pocus of "plans". I was grateful to him as you would be grateful to a stranger who had returned a lost child. He, the man with the yellow skin, had recalled for the benefit of a white-skinned intellectual in danger of forgetting it, that true human culture he had learnt in Paris, a culture combining knowledge and humanity. What an encouraging experience to find those teachings on the lips of an unexpected disciple when their proper champion had failed!

But Dr. Tang symbolised something even more moving than all this; something which warmed my heart: the suffering and yet

fastidious people of China. As his frail silhouette disappeared into the dusk, its place was taken by the cohorts of his compatriot refugees whose shattering confidences I had been privileged to receive. It was among them, I felt, that the key to the problems Dr. Tang and I had discussed was to be found. And as the ferry took me on my last crossing, cutting through the arm of sea like the slit in the dresses of Chinese girls, and leaving a gentle foam in its wake, I once again recalled their words and their appearance to my mind.

First of all they had brought me precious comfort, because—and why should I not admit it?—I had suffered from the label “systematic anti-Communist” tied on to me. I knew, of course, that it was the Communists who had invented it in order to discredit their consistent opponents with the odium of I don’t know what pathological fanaticism; a piece of trickery which is all the more perfidious because the very first systematic thing which strikes anyone is the evil of Communism; so much so that it is difficult to see how you could possibly oppose it in any way but systematically. However, they did manage to attach such a stigma to that word that I often felt that even my nearest friends sometimes wondered whether I was exaggerating. And now suddenly I realised that far from feeling hurt at that label I should wear it with pride, since I carried it in such excellent company. And it is true: after the Hungarian refugees it is the Chinese refugees who are the living proof of a fact as important as it is not—or not yet—understood: namely that *the most systematic anti-Communists are the people in the Communist countries themselves*. And I could afford to congratulate myself on having always felt myself at one with them.

On the other hand, I understood that my denigrators were sufficiently illogical to rely on a harvest whose seed their own policy did its best to spoil, since that thaw in Communist dictatorship they claim to desire, as far as it is possible at all, can only be the work of those anti-Communist forces they have never ceased to denigrate. Yes, the free world owes its survival today to the unquenchable hatred the peoples of Poland, Hungary, Russia, China and Vietnam bear their Communist rulers, demonstrated sometimes by silent refusal and sometimes by violent uprisings. It is thanks to these thousands of millions of people, foolishly supposed by Edgar Faure to be Communists whereas in reality they are a constant source of trouble to Communism, thanks to the underground danger these discontented masses represent on the Communist home front that the Communists leaders hesitate

to launch the final assault on the outer front. That is to say that Edgar Faure and I and all the rest of us in the West still enjoy our liberty not thanks to our own courage, but to the Fan Lings and the Ivan Ivanovitches who have systematically refused their obedience to Mao and Khrushchev. If the thousand million Fan Lings and Ivans are to be invoked at all, then it should certainly not be in order to justify the appeasement of their tyrants, but as our most precious allies in our joint defence against those tyrants. It is their obstinate resistance which will one day bring about our salvation and their deliverance. Therefore in the persons of those Hongkong refugees I was happy to salute the brothers of those more numerous Chinese whose backs are still bent under the yoke but who go on day after day providing a heartening example of magnificent resistance to tyranny.

Thus neither Dr. Tang nor I even attempted to deny that deep down in the lower layers of Soviet and Chinese Communist society there is a core of resistance which will one day blow off that heavy cover of lead which the Communists have clamped down on it. But what we do deny is that this outlook should be considered a justification for our appeasement of the tyrants who control that leaden cover. And that is the only aim of those who now advise us to make friends with the Communist leaders, saying that if we do we shall thereby improve their behaviour. They forget that they gave us exactly the same advice in the days of Stalin the Terrible.

A historical example which we should recall at this moment is that of Ledru-Rollin who refused the hand offered him by Napoleon III when that gentleman was pretending to liberalise his régime. It should teach us that when despotism is toppling under the weight of its own crimes, democrats should not, if they want to accelerate its fall, reduce the vigour of their opposition, but, on the contrary, strengthen it. The only way to increase whatever inclination there may be on the part of the Communist leaders to seek a *détente* is to renew our pledge of solidarity with the oppressed, who are the real artisans of it in the first place. That would be to repeat beyond the Iron Curtain in a loud voice the "No!" the oppressed themselves inside the Iron Curtain can pronounce only beneath their breath.

I see them all once again in my mind and I realise that they are inviting me to go even further, to the very source of their sufferings, which is at the same time the source of our own anxieties; namely, totalitarianism. I realise that although it is necessary to strengthen NATO, and sign pacts, no text and no defence can give us security so

long as totalitarian Machiavellis rule over an empire of a thousand million serfs. There can be only one hope and only one guarantee of peace in our time, and that is the fall of the dictatorships in Moscow and Peking. As long as they remain in existence no man in any place on earth can look forward to the future with any confidence. That is a harsh truth, and the duty to express it is all the more urgent.

But if the ultimate objective of our policy is to bring about the fall of the dictatorships in Moscow and Peking, then obviously the best way to accomplish it, without war, is to let them be overthrown by a revolt of their own peoples. Thus, if the West wishes to preserve peace without surrendering, then its most urgent and sacred task is to underline its solidarity with those peoples, since they are our most effective, our most valuable and our most endangered allies.

And I heard their voices sounding more clearly within me, and saw their looks growing more urgent. I remember feeling rather disappointed one day at the beginning of my investigations because I had produced no reaction at all by telling them that I was a Frenchwoman and a Socialist; and then I realised that those classifications which meant so much to me meant very little to those who had known the full weight of Communist tyranny; and that for them I represented something far greater: simply the world in which men are not subjugated. And I began to understand that from the mass of their complaints an essence was distilled, like a stream spurting from inside the mountains: "Do not forget our sufferings! Do not forget the despotism! And unless you want to fall victim to that despotism yourself, forget your divisions! Because it is through the chinks in your armour, brought about by your national rivalries and political dissensions, that the enemy steel will seek entrance. Let your countries, which are still free, and your movements, which are still humanitarian, pay heed at last to the age-old cry of all those who find themselves besieged: 'Unite or Perish!'"

And the following day, when in the space of a minute the plane put several miles between my safety and their distress, I realised in that same minute the gravamen of their message: that their sacrifices not only demand that nations and parties should unite beyond frontiers and above doctrines, but also show them the bond which can join them. That bond is the fire which animates all the captive peoples without exception and irrespective of race; it is the same fire which blows in the forges of all our civilisations; it is the fire called: FREEDOM.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1948 April The fortunes of civil war turn in favour of the Communist Party. Mao Tse-tung reports to the Seventh Party Congress on "the Democratic People's Dictatorship".
- 1949 Spring Chiang Kai-shek and his forces retire to Formosa.
- September 21 Mao Tse-tung proclaims the People's Republic of China.
- September 29 The "Consultative Conference of the Chinese People" adopts the "Common Programme", which serves as the Provisional Constitution from 1949 to 1954.
- October 1 Inauguration of the Central Government of the People's Republic of China.
- 1950 April 13 New Marriage Law introduced.
- June Third session of Seventh Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in Peking.
- June 20 New Trade Union Law introduced.
- June 29 Agrarian Reform Law introduced.
- June 30 General instructions for the establishment of Courts of Justice.
- July 23 Law for the Suppression of the Counter-revolution introduced.
- September Decree on the provisional organisation of Tribunals.
- November Abolition of the right to strike.
- 1951 Sending of "Volunteers" to Korea. The Anti-Imperialist Movement (against the United States).
- February Regulations for the punishment of counter-revolutionaries published (Twenty-one Articles).

- First national campaign for the liquidation of counter-revolutionaries.
- September 29 Movement of the Three Antis (San Fan).
Reformation of Thought. First purge of Chinese intellectuals. Official inauguration by Chou En-lai.
- 1952 January 9 Campaign of the Five Antis (Wu Fan).
February Socialist competition movement to increase production.
March Establishment of People's Courts in connection with the Three and the Five Antis.
August Movement for judicial reform.
Campaign for public health and hygiene, etc.
Start of the colonisation of Sinkiang and the marches.
June Law introducing compulsory military service for all male adults.
- 1953 Start of the first Five-Year Plan. Chou En-lai having announced its imminence in December 1952.
February 15 Communist Party decision obliging all peasants to join the agricultural co-operatives. Nationalisation of the artisanate and suppression of free artisans.
March Electoral law introduced.
Campaign against the three plagues: bureaucracy, arrogance and abuses.
November Nationalisation of the purchase and distribution of grain—to become law on March 1, 1954
- 1954 February Fourth session of the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party in Peking. Purge of the "anti-Party" group of Kao Kang, one of the six Vice-Presidents of China and Governor of Manchuria, and of Jao Shu-shih, President of the Organisational Bureau of the Communist Party.
July 14 Regulations for the organisation of labour in State-run undertakings.

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| August 26 | Regulations for the Reformatory Labour Camps—promulgated on September 7. |
| September | First Session of the National Assembly at Peking. Five laws passed. |
| September 20 | Promulgation of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. |
| September 21 | Law on the organisation of People's Courts and Public Ministries. |
| October | Second purge of Chinese intellectuals begins with the condemnation of the novel <i>Dream of the Red Pavilion</i> . |
| December 20 | Regulations on the arrest and detention of prisoners. |
| December 31 | Regulations for the organisation of street committees, district committees and police stations. |
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| 1955 April | Fifth session of the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party in Peking. Strengthening of secret police control.
Second national campaign for the liquidation of the counter-revolution. |
| May | Movement to curb the intellectuals. The Hyu Feng crisis. |
| July 31 | Agrarian collectivisation launched by Mao. Second session of the First National Assembly. |
| October | Sixth session of the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party in Peking approves agricultural collectivisation. |
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| 1956 January | Plan for joint public and private management of undertakings still privately run ended by <i>de facto</i> abolition of private property. |
| August | Declaration and report of Mao: "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." |
| September | First session of the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party in Peking: strengthening of the control of economic activities; legal |

elimination of mixed undertakings in favour of State property.

- 1957 February Speech of Mao "on the correct solution of internal differences". Campaign of rectification of the Party by the people; the so-called "One Hundred Flowers" campaign.
- May Even the severest criticisms of the Communist Party and the government are allowed and published in the press.
- June 15 Sudden halting of the "One Hundred Flowers" campaign. Start of the anti-right-wing campaign. Suppression of critics and opponents. Forced transfer of students and disgraced officials to work in the country.
- July Fourth session of the First National Assembly.
- November The "Great Leap Forward".
- 1958 May Second session of the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party in Peking. The 1957 session had been cancelled on account of the "One Hundred Flowers" campaign and the campaign against the right-wingers. Adoption of anti-revisionism against Tito.
Launching of the People's Communes. The decree officially introducing them is dated August 29.
- August Bombardment of Quemoy and Matsu by the Chinese Red Army.
- December Communist Party conference at Wuhan. Mao announces his resignation of the Presidency of the Chinese Republic. Urban People's Communes discouraged—they having become too unpopular.
- 1959 March Uprising in Tibet and in Western China bloodily suppressed.
Liou Chao-chi becomes President of the Republic in place of Mao Tse-tung, who retains the Presidency of the Communist Party.

NOTE ON CURRENCY RATES

<i>Chinese yuans</i>		<i>French heavy francs</i>		<i>British £ sterling</i>		<i>American dollars</i>
1 yuan	=	1·7 h.f.	=	£0 2s. 8d.	=	\$0·35
·59 yuans	=	1 h.f.	=	£0 1s. 7d.	=	\$0·21
8·25 yuans	=	13·74 h.f.	=	£1 0s. 0d.	=	\$2·80
2·95 yuans	=	4·90 h.f.	=	£0 7s. 2d.	=	\$1·00

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